

IELTS PRACTICE TASK

Extinct birds of New Zealand

Many species of birds that once lived in this South Pacific country aren't found today.

Today, New Zealand is a typical, modern country with cities, towns and roads. But for many thousands of years, and until relatively recently, the more than 3,000 islands that make up the country had no human inhabitants at all. Instead, a vast number of birds lived in its forests, mountains and along the thousands of kilometres of beaches. In fact, New Zealand probably had more species of birds than any other country in the world. One reason for this was that the natural environment was a perfect source of food to support the bird population, particularly from the enormous oceans that surround the country. With so much food readily available, it's not surprising that the bird population grew. Another important factor was that the birds had no predators on land because, with the exception of a single species of bat, there weren't any mammals at all in the country that would otherwise have killed birds and kept their numbers down. Because of this, over many, many years, New Zealand's birds developed characteristics not associated with bird populations in other countries. For example, they didn't have to defend themselves from predators, so many birds lived on the ground and didn't have wings because they didn't need to fly, such as the iconic kiwi bird and also the much larger, ostrich-like bird called the moa. This characteristic allowed the birds to save huge amounts of energy and provided them with numerous other advantages – so long as they didn't need to defend themselves against attacks by predators! One final development was that many of these birds now made their nests on the ground rather than in trees and the eggs that they laid became much bigger over time. This was just one more factor that made these populations of birds very vulnerable when humans eventually reached New Zealand.

The first human migrants to New Zealand were the Maori people, who arrived approximately 800 years ago. The Maori sailed from their original homes in the tropical Pacific to New Zealand in canoes, bringing food supplies and many of the things they needed to set up new homes. Unfortunately, however, they unintentionally brought Pacific rats with them as well, a species previously unknown in New Zealand, and these killed many birds that were unable to fly away. The Maori themselves also hunted birds for food, and their loud calls in the forest at night time made them particularly easy to find. Birds were useful in other ways, too. Fish hooks were frequently manufactured from bones, while feathers were highly prized as decorations to be worn in the hair or clothing. The results of this, in terms of bird populations, has been calculated by the scientist Paul Martin. His research since the 1960s has assessed the impact on flora and fauna of human arrival in various parts of the world, and he has concluded that New Zealand is a unique example because bird species were wiped out so fast, relative to other countries.

TASK TYPE 2 Note/Table Completion

European migrants started arriving in significant numbers in the early 1800s and brought with them a whole lot of new problems. The journals of the earliest European explorers in the country are full of references to how they relied on their hunting dogs to catch birds in order to supply the expedition with food, and these animals have been a constant threat to bird life ever since. Many of the European settlers came to New Zealand to set up farms, but before this was possible it was necessary to clear the land of trees, and this process of deforestation had serious consequences for many birds, as their habitats were destroyed. As the country's population has grown and the need for more land for housing, industry and farming has increased with it, many more bird species have faced extinction. However, in recent decades attempts have been made to save some of these endangered species by creating sanctuaries where they can live and breed. The location for nearly all of these sanctuaries has been small islands scattered around the coastline, which can be kept free of predators and pests. In some cases, this includes human beings, allowing the environment to return to its original condition.

Questions 1–4

Complete the notes below.

Write **ONE WORD ONLY** from the passage for each answer.

New Zealand before humans arrived

- there were many birds
- the large 1 provided food for birds
- there were no 2 on land so birds had few predators
- many birds had no 3 so couldn't defend themselves, e.g. moa
- birds' 4 were also very large
- birds were very vulnerable

TASK TYPE 2 Note/Table Completion

Questions 5–10

Complete the table below.

Write **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

Human migration to New Zealand

	Reasons Birds Died	Results
Maori migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● 5 were accidentally introduced to New Zealand● birds' loud calls made them easy to find● birds' feathers were used for decoration and bones for 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● according to Paul Martin, the extinction of some species was unusually 7
European migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● explorers used 8 to kill birds for food● creating farms caused 9 and loss of habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● attempts to save endangered species on 10 around the country