

Ulva Island's Weka

Flying about in a breeze, long and slender, speckled brown and black, the feathers of the Stewart Island weka bring to mind a cross between the feathers of kiwi and a fancy breed of chook.

From the scrub by Boulder Beach a young weka emerges, watching discreetly as I settle on the sand until I take a Nelson pear from my backpack. Fearlessly he approaches me.

Suddenly the whole whanau appears, a military operation in action, planned and practised manoeuvres, marching across my legs, firing pecks at the young one forcing it to abandon its prime position on my right, taking over the attack with determination and style.

Close to each side of my face sturdy take-no-prisoners beaks target the object of desire I'm consuming while attempting to video the scene. The usual measurement of species survival is reversed and I am indeed threatened.

A defensive strategy must be devised quickly. I drop the camera, utilise my elbows inelegantly but effectively, up and down, in and out, until a piece of pear flies off in the action, landing by my feet where the young one had retreated. Gone.

From down the beach reinforcements arrive.
In a diversionary action, I toss some pear further away.
A weka takes off with the spoils of war pursued
by the whanau. I succeed in recording
the resulting skirmish.

Now the young one takes advantage
of their absence, closing in for the kill;
head cocked sideways,
enquiring brown eyes on mine.
Do wild things know how irresistible they are?
I surrender the remnant of the pear.

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