



## Media Statement

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# Hunters to choose their champion for Bird of the Year

The Game Animal Council (GAC), the NZ Deerstalkers Association (NZDA) and Hunters for Conservation are providing hunters with the opportunity to choose either the kārearea/NZ falcon or the whio as their 'champion' bird to back in the upcoming Bird of the Year competition.

"In 2019, hunters got behind the kārearea/NZ falcon to a very creditable ninth place, so we think it is appropriate to give it a chance to defend its position as the hunters' champion," says GAC General Manager Tim Gale. "It will face stiff competition to retain its spot, however, with the whio also very popular amongst hunters."

"The whio got sixth in last year's competition and is a stalwart of the backcountry, living in fast flowing mountain rivers and streams. It is also recognised on our \$10 note."

Both the Central North Island Sika Foundation and the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation voluntarily manage extensive trapping programmes to reduce predator numbers helping to protect vulnerable whio populations.

"Going up against New Zealand's original hunter, the kārearea, is a daunting prospect, though. This small falcon can easily fly at speeds over 100km/h and is capable of taking down prey much larger than itself."

"Hunters are involved in conservation work all over New Zealand, although most of the time it goes unrecognised," says NZDA Chief Executive Gwyn Thurlow. "As well as involvement in predator trapping projects and kea surveying, hunters also work to restore our backcountry heritage through hut preservation and track cutting."

Hunters for Conservation spokesperson Jason Van Beers has noticed a heightened interest from hunters to promote their projects and do more in the conservation space.

"Inspiring the hunting community to get involved in boots on the ground conservation projects that make a real difference is critical to the preservation of our threatened species and is what Hunters for Conservation is about. The Bird of the Year competition is a great way to

help further raise awareness and educate hunters, which is why we are so supportive of it.”

Hunters can vote for either the kārearea or whio at the Game Animal Council Facebook page.

Forest & Bird’s Bird of the Year runs from 2-15 November and the Game Animal Council, Hunters for Conservation and NZDA will announce the hunters’ champion bird the day the competition begins.

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