

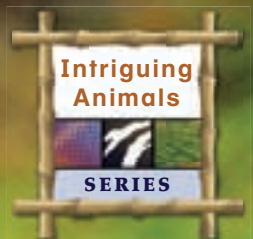
# Protecting the Kakapo



SAMPLE

LLI RED SYSTEM BOOK

by Bob Morrow



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**Protecting the Kakapo**

Author: Bob Morrow

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# A Parrot Like No Other

Imagine a fat green parrot that waddles like a duck, growls like a dog, and has whiskers like a cat. It has wings but it can't fly. It sleeps all day while other birds are awake. And it has a strong, sweet smell, like honey.

This unusual bird is the kakapo (KAH-keh-poh) parrot. It is one of the rarest birds on the planet.





Once, the forests of New Zealand were filled with kakapo parrots. They thrived because they had no enemies. There were no people or animals in New Zealand to hunt them. Then, people arrived in New Zealand. Everything changed for the kakapo.

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# Kakapo in Trouble

About 700 years ago, the Maori (may-OR-ee) people came to New Zealand from islands in the Pacific Ocean. The Maori hunted the kakapo for food. They used its beautiful feathers to make capes. The kakapo was easy to catch. It lived on the ground and couldn't fly away. Its strong smell made it easy for Maori hunting dogs to find.



Kakapo do not nest in trees. They make nests in hollows under the ground.

In the 1700s, more people started coming to New Zealand. This time, they came from Europe. They also hunted the kakapo. And they brought more animals—cats and weasels and rats. Cats and weasels attacked the birds. Rats ate their eggs. The kakapo could not protect itself. Many thousands were killed. By the 1950s, the kakapo had not been seen in New Zealand for a long time. Most people thought the species had died out.



## How Rare Is the Kakapo?

*In 2010, there were*

200,000,000,000 living **birds** in the world.

6,900,000,000 living **people** in the world.

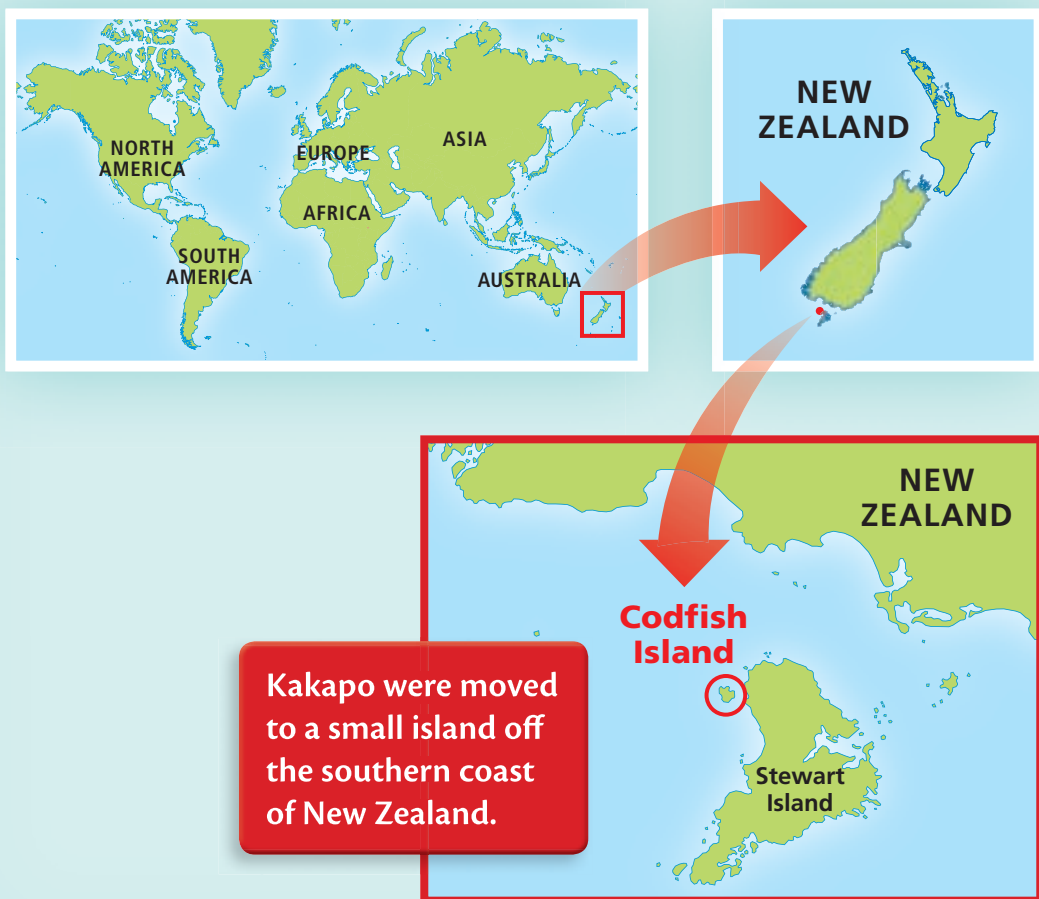
122 living **kakapo** in the world.

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# Scientists Step In

But the kakapo was not quite extinct. In the 1970s, a few kakapo parrots were found. Scientists were thrilled. They had a chance to save the species! They decided to try.

First, the scientists moved the kakapo to a small island called Codfish Island. They made sure that there were no animals on the island to harm the kakapo. No dogs, no weasels, no rats, no cats, and no people.







A helicopter arrives with people and supplies to help the kakapo.

Then a **recovery team** was formed. This is a team of scientists, forest rangers, and volunteers. The team members take turns visiting Codfish Island to care for the kakapo. Before they visit, they wash their clothes and bags in a strong soap that kills germs. This is so they won't carry germs that might make the kakapo sick.

## What Is a Recovery Team?

A recovery team is a group of people that works to save a species from dying.

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# The Recovery Team in Action

Once on the island, team members use high-tech tools to keep track of the birds. One tool is a little backpack that each kakapo wears. The backpack contains a radio **transmitter**. It sends a signal that tells the team members where the bird is.

Kakapo get  
regular checkups.







Another helpful tool is called a **snark**. The snark is a box with a radio **receiver** and a small computer inside. Scientists have placed snarks all around the island. The snarks pick up the birds' signals when they are on the move. Like the backpacks, the snarks help the recovery team know where to find the kakapo.

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# Kakapo Babies

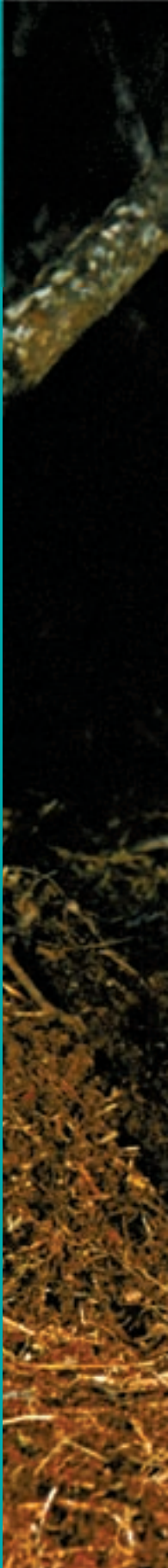
The recovery team wants to make sure the kakapo have babies. The more babies the kakapo have, the better their chances of survival. So the team keeps careful track of kakapo who are having babies.

After the kakapo mate, the female lays her eggs. She chooses a hidden spot, like a hollow under the ground. Then she hatches, or sits on, her eggs.

But the kakapo can't watch her eggs all of the time, so the recovery team helps. The team attaches an alarm to each kakapo nest. Then helpers called "**nest minders**" get to work. The nest minders make sure the eggs are safe, especially at night, when the kakapo leave their nests.

## A Noisy Male Kakapo

It's not hard for the team to tell when a male kakapo wants to find a mate. First, the kakapo scrapes a hole in the ground. The hole is called a "bowl." Then, he sits in the bowl, swells up like a balloon, and makes a deep, echoing noise. This sound is called "booming." It can be heard up to 3 miles (5 kilometers) away.



A male kakapo bird is shown in a dark forest at night. The bird has green and yellow feathers and a large, light-colored beak. It is sitting on the forest floor, which is covered in dry leaves and twigs. A large, gnarled tree branch hangs down from the top of the frame. The bird's mouth is open, and it appears to be calling.

A male kakapo calls  
from the bowl it made  
on the forest floor.

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# Minding the Nest

Each night, when a mother kakapo sets out to find food, an alarm sounds. It wakes the nest minders. If there's an egg in the nest, the nest minders keep it warm with a heated blanket while the mother is away. If there's a chick, they watch over it until the mother returns.

Chicks in an incubator are fed special kakapo baby food.





Sometimes a mother kakapo leaves her egg for too long or does not give her chick enough to eat. Then the nest minders take the egg or chick out of the nest. They put the egg in a warm box called an **incubator**. The egg stays in the incubator until it hatches. By making sure that eggs and chicks survive, the team is helping to increase the number of kakapo.



## Newborn Kakapo

A kakapo has pink skin and fluffy, white down when it is born. It weighs less than an ounce (24 grams). That's about as much as a letter in an envelope.

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This volunteer is weighing a kakapo chick.



# A Future for the Kakapo

The recovery team is working hard to bring the kakapo back from the edge of extinction. The team is slowly succeeding. Today there are 131 kakapo. The hope is that someday there will be so many kakapo that the birds no longer need human help.

But why help the kakapo survive at all? After all, would anyone miss the bird if it died out? In New Zealand, the answer is yes!

Long ago, people killed the kakapo without thinking. They didn't realize they were wiping out a species. Today, we know better. We know that many animal species have been lost, so we want to protect every one we can. People almost caused the kakapo to become extinct. Now it's our job to protect these gentle animals for the future.

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# Glossary

**incubator** a warm box for hatching eggs and raising chicks

**nest minder** a volunteer who protects kakapo eggs and chicks when the mother has left the nest

**receiver** the part of a radio that picks up a signal

**recovery team** a group of scientists, forest rangers, and volunteers in New Zealand who work to save a species from dying

**snark** a box with a small computer used to locate and track kakapo

**transmitter** the part of a radio that sends a signal

## **Uncertain Future**

Until about 700 years ago, millions of kakapo parrots lived in the forests of New Zealand. Today, this unique bird is critically endangered, and New Zealand conservation officials are working hard to save it. By mid-2011, a group of 131 kakapo was living on protected islands off the southern coast of New Zealand. The hope is that these numbers will increase, but only time will tell.

## **Acknowledgment**

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## Strange and Endangered

A funny-looking flightless parrot struggles back from the brink of extinction. Meet the kakapo, one of the world's most unusual—and endearing—birds.

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