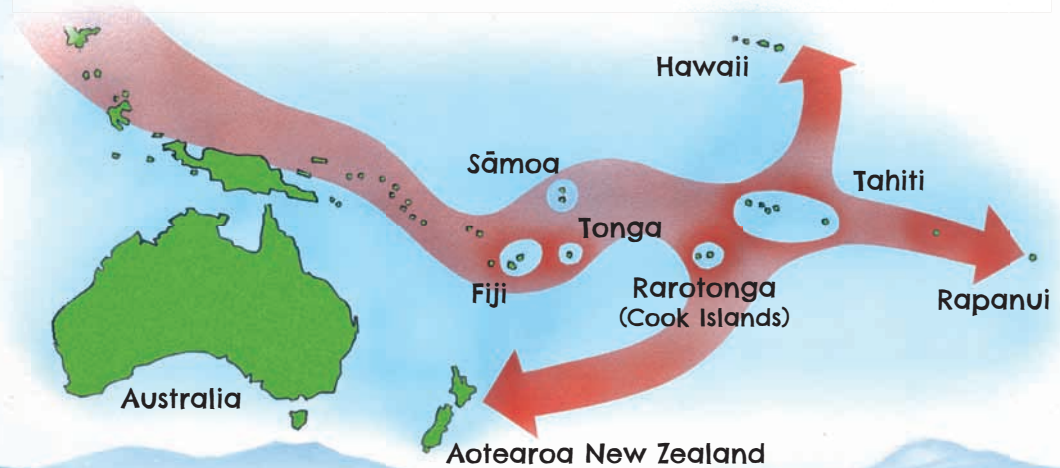


# Kurī

by Priscilla Wehi

## How Did Kurī Come to Aotearoa?

In Hawaii, the Cook Islands, and Aotearoa New Zealand, people have found dog bones that are hundreds or even thousands of years old. Scientists have studied these bones. They have worked out that the bones came from dogs that were all related to one another. Scientists agree that the ancestors of kurī probably came from east Asia and travelled from island to island with their owners.



Over two thousand years ago, the early Polynesians began sailing across the Pacific Ocean looking for new lands. Their journeys were long and difficult, and they didn't know how long they might be travelling. But these groups of people were not always alone in their waka. Sometimes Polynesian dogs (kurī) were on the waka, too. These dogs were well loved and cared for by their owners.

Kurī arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand with the early Polynesian voyagers. Scientists think that the dogs were brought here because people knew kurī would help them to stay alive in the new land. Dogs were good hunters – they could help find and catch birds like kiwi – and they could also be eaten if their owner was starving. Kurī were good companions as well, and sometimes, chiefs kept them as pets. All iwi of Aotearoa have interesting stories about their kurī.



## Two Explorers and Their Kuri

Tāneatua was a well-known explorer. Stories passed down by Māori tell us that he was in charge of kuri on *Mataatua*, the waka that landed at Whakatāne. When Tāneatua arrived in Aotearoa, he began exploring the forests and hills of the Urewera. He took his kuri with him.

Tāneatua and his dogs are famous in the Urewera and eastern Bay of Plenty. There is a small town named after him, and there are many place names that tell the story of his journey. The stories say that Tāneatua lost some of his dogs. When he started off, he left one of his kuri behind – people say the dog is still there, in the shape of a hill called Ōtarahīoi. (The hill is also known as Te Kuri-a-Tāneatua.)

Tāneatua left another of his dogs in the Ruatoki valley. That dog was called Ōkiwa. The very cold, misty wind that blows down the valley is called “the breath of Ōkiwa”. Another of his dogs died, so he threw its body off a cliff. The place where this happened is called Whakataka (which means “to throw off”).

Īhenga was another great explorer who always had a dog by his side. He was one of the first people to live in the Rotorua district. Īhenga found Te Rotoiti-kite-a-Īhenga (the small lake found by Īhenga) when his dog Pōtakatawhiti ran ahead to look for food. It came back with a wet coat and some fish in its mouth, so Īhenga knew that there was a lake nearby.

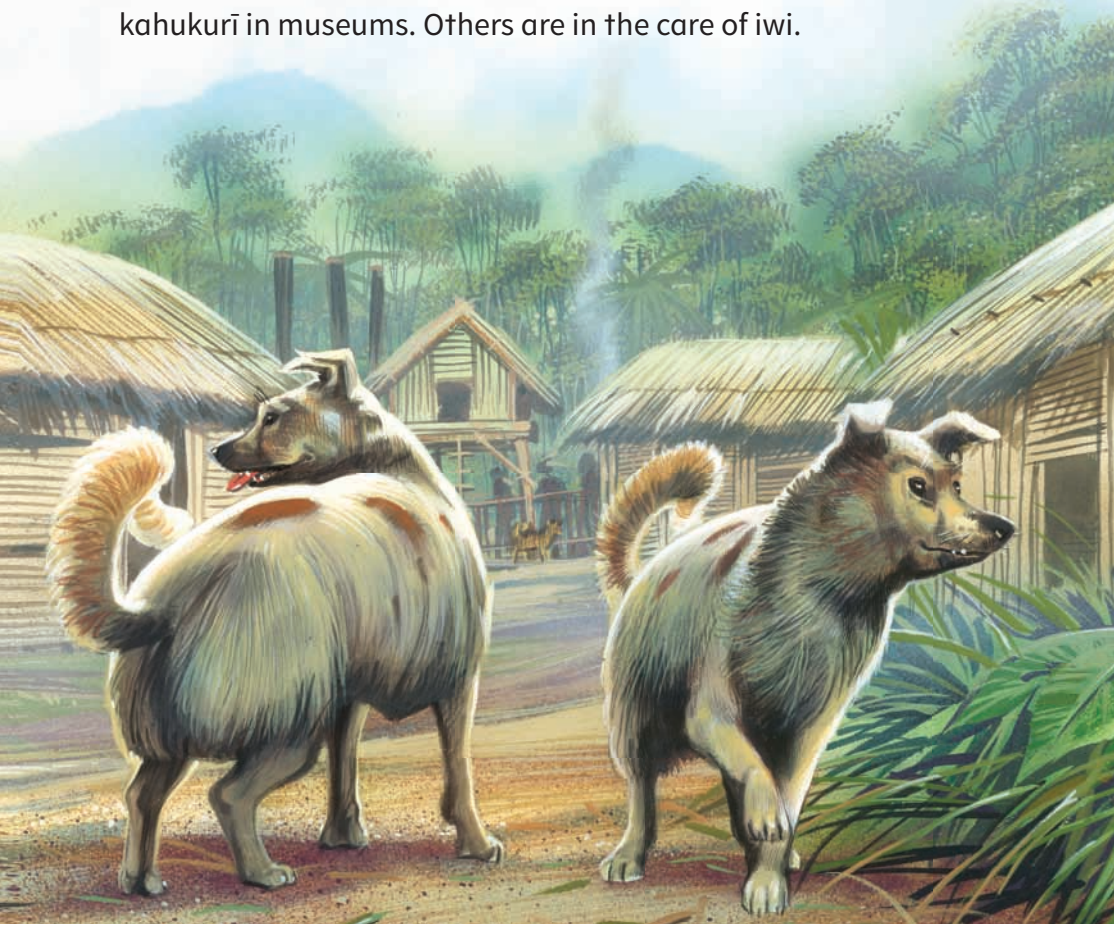




## What Were Kurī Like?

When Captain Cook arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, artists on his ship painted what they saw. Some of their pictures show kurī sitting on waka with Māori. This is one of the ways we know what kurī looked like.

Kurī were small dogs with long hair, pointed ears, and strong jaws. The hair on their tails was very long. People often shaved off this hair and used it to make cloaks or kahukurī. Sometimes they also used the skins of kurī to make cloaks. These cloaks were very thick and strong and would help to protect the wearer from injury during hand-to-hand fighting. You can see some of these kahukurī in museums. Others are in the care of iwi.



## Te Urewera Cloak

This kurī cloak belongs to Te Urewera hapū that came from Ruatāhuna to Ruatoki. It has been handed down through many generations. The hair came from the dogs of an important chief. The cloak is worn on special occasions, for example, it was worn by Tūhoe chief negotiator Tamati Kruger at the signing of the Tūhoe Treaty settlement.



## Why Did Kurī Disappear?

After Pākehā arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand, kurī disappeared. We don't know why this happened. One reason could be that kurī bred with the dogs that Pākehā **settlers** brought with them. Many of their puppies became wild. Farmers didn't like dogs running wild and attacking their sheep, so these dogs were often shot and killed.

It's also possible that kurī were dying out before Pākehā arrived. Kurī bones have been found in **middens**. People threw away the bones when they finished eating.

Some middens are many hundreds of years old. Other middens are newer – only two or three hundred years old. The bones found in the older middens were mostly the bones from young dogs. In the newer middens, the bones were mostly of adult dogs. This tells us that by the time Pākehā arrived, there may not have been many young dogs left.



## Looking for an Answer

Scientists are trying to find out why kurī disappeared. It's possible to tell what the kurī were eating by studying the **chemicals** in their bones, teeth, and hair.

It's likely that kurī ate the same kinds of food as the people who looked after them. Kurī that lived a long time ago probably ate a lot of birds. Early on, there were still plenty of **moa**. Later, we think they ate more fish. When kurī ate lots of fish or lots of plants, it changed the chemicals in their hair and bones.

By studying kurī hair and bones, we can find out what they ate.



By putting together clues about what the dogs ate, and when people started eating them, we can find out more about kurī. We can also learn more about what people ate and where their food came from. These things help us to understand how traditional Māori **society** was changing over time.



## Glossary

**chemicals:** solids, liquids, or gases that make up the world (in fact, anything we can touch is made of different chemicals – even us)

**moa:** a large, flightless bird that is no longer living

**middens:** very old rubbish dumps, mainly containing shells and bones, in places where people used to live

**natural resources:** things a country has that people can use, such as land, water, forests, fish, and coal

**settlers:** people who come to live in a country

**society:** a group of people living together

## “Kuri”: About the Author

Dr Priscilla Wehi is a scientist with Manaaki Whenua (Landcare Research). The company works for the government to protect the environment and to make sure our **natural resources** are used wisely. Dr Wehi is studying the way Māori have used and looked after the environment over time. She is hoping that what she learns can be used to help look after our environment today and in the future.





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by Priscilla Wehi

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Published 2015 by the Ministry of Education  
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ISBN 978 0 478 16438 1 (online)

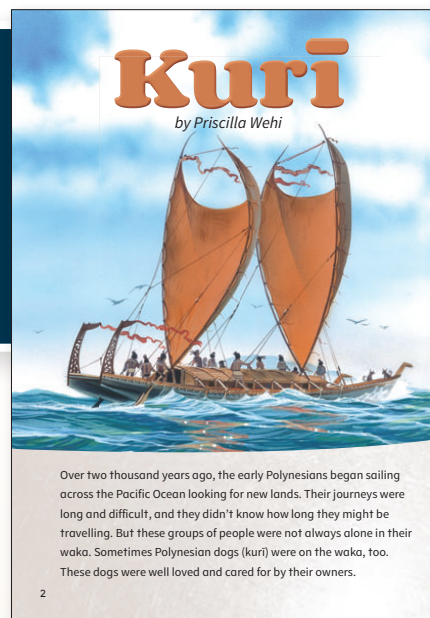
Publishing services: Lift Education E Tū

Editor: David Chadwick

Designer: Liz Tui Morris

Literacy Consultant: Melanie Winthrop

Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui and Emeli Sione



## SCHOOL JOURNAL LEVEL 2, OCTOBER 2015

<b>Curriculum learning areas</b>	English Social Sciences Science
<b>Reading year level</b>	Year 4
<b>Keywords</b>	cloaks, dogs, environment, explorers, Īhenga, kahukurī, kurī, middens, migration, Polynesian dogs, Tāneatua, traditional Māori society, Te Urewera