

# AWARUA

## THE TANIWHA OF PORIRUA

by Wiremu Grace



Awarua was a taniwha who lived in Porirua Harbour many hundreds of years ago. In those days, the harbour was very deep, and the hills around it were covered with trees.

Awarua would often swim out into Te Moana o Raukawa to find food, but she would always return to the harbour. It was her home.

Sometimes the taniwha would chat with Rereroa the albatross. Awarua loved to hear Rereroa talk about the things she saw when she was flying across the ocean. The albatross could fly for days, using her great wings to glide on the wind. Awarua wished she could fly like that, too.



“You are my good friend, Rereroa,” said Awarua one day. “Will you teach me to fly?”

Rereroa looked at her own wings. Then she looked at her friend’s wings. “They are very small,” she thought. “It will be impossible to teach her to fly.”

But Rereroa didn’t want to say that to Awarua. “I don’t have time,” she said instead. “I have to keep flying and catching food to live! I couldn’t stay in one place long enough to teach you.”

“I will feed you,” Awarua said quickly. “I have lots of fish stored in my pātaka.”

So Rereroa reluctantly agreed to teach the taniwha to fly.



On the first day of flying lessons, Awarua was nervous.

“Flying takes a lot of practice and a lot of time,” said Rereroa. “First you must make your wings stronger. Follow me and copy what I do.”

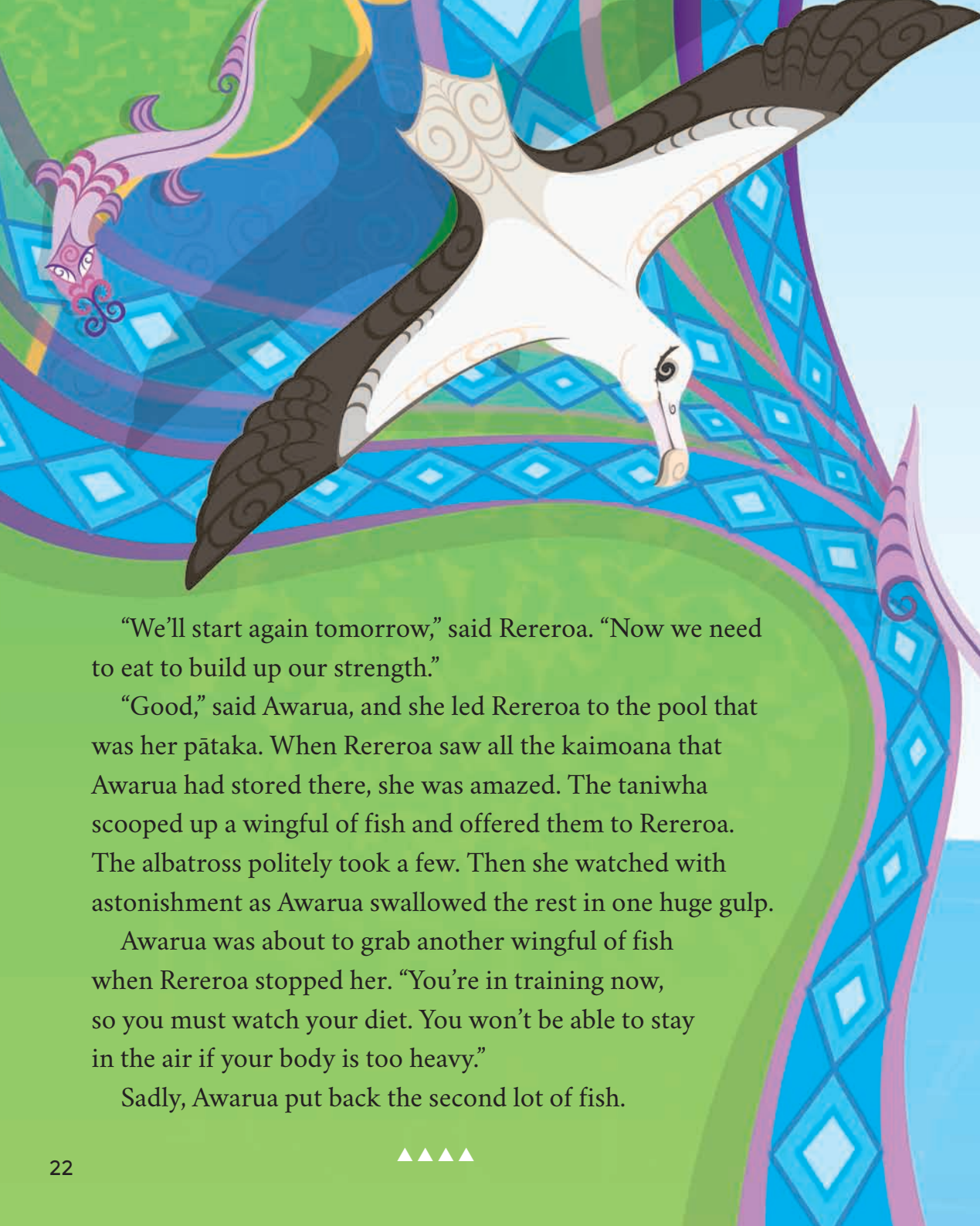
Rereroa set off. She went right around the harbour, paddling her feet and slowly flapping her wings but without taking off. Awarua followed her. By the time they got back to where they had started, Awarua was exhausted.

“That was harder than I thought,” said the taniwha. “My small wings feel very weak.”

“Albatross chicks are the same when they are learning to fly,” Rereroa replied. “You will need to keep training so that your wings get stronger.” Rereroa picked up two large stones. “Put these on your wings,” she said to Awarua. “Then raise your wings above your head until the tips touch.”

Awarua did what her friend asked, but it was very hard with the weight of the stones. After ten flaps, she was too tired to continue.





“We’ll start again tomorrow,” said Rereroa. “Now we need to eat to build up our strength.”

“Good,” said Awarua, and she led Rereroa to the pool that was her pātaka. When Rereroa saw all the kaimoana that Awarua had stored there, she was amazed. The taniwha scooped up a wingful of fish and offered them to Rereroa. The albatross politely took a few. Then she watched with astonishment as Awarua swallowed the rest in one huge gulp.

Awarua was about to grab another wingful of fish when Rereroa stopped her. “You’re in training now, so you must watch your diet. You won’t be able to stay in the air if your body is too heavy.”

Sadly, Awarua put back the second lot of fish.

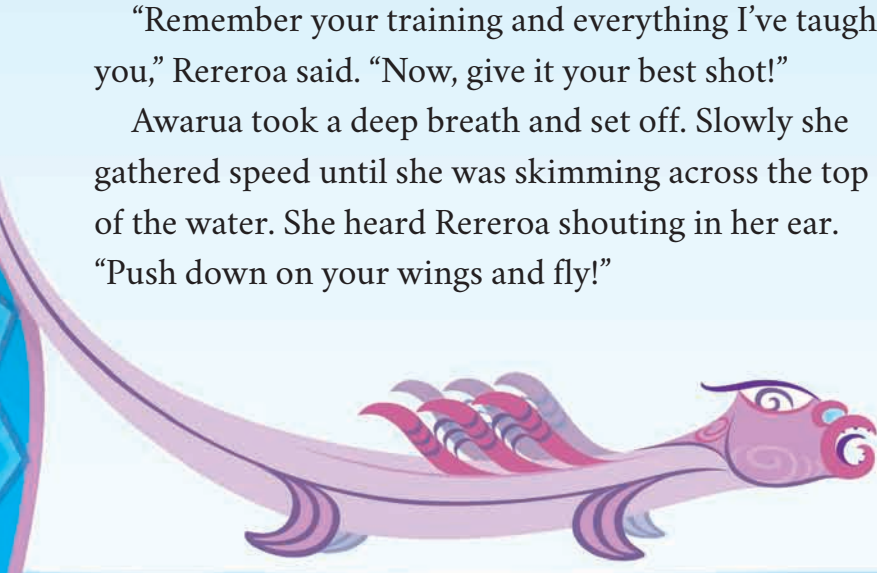


Over the next few weeks, Awarua trained every day. Soon she was speeding across the surface of the water and lifting her weighted wings easily. At last, Rereroa said it was time for the taniwha to try her first take-off.

The two friends went to the southern end of the harbour. First, Rereroa told Awarua to stretch her wings to warm up her muscles. Then she told the taniwha to turn and face towards Whitireia, the local maunga.

“Remember your training and everything I’ve taught you,” Rereroa said. “Now, give it your best shot!”

Awarua took a deep breath and set off. Slowly she gathered speed until she was skimming across the top of the water. She heard Rereroa shouting in her ear. “Push down on your wings and fly!”



Awarua knew she was nearing the other side of the harbour, so she raised her head and pushed all her energy into her wings. The next moment, she was in the air. But Whitireia was straight ahead of her. Flapping her wings furiously, Awarua tried to gain more height, but it was too late! With a huge thump, she smashed into the side of the maunga.

Luckily, the trees softened the impact. Awarua emerged from a pile of broken branches with a huge smile on her face. “Did you see? Did you see me fly?” she screeched excitedly.

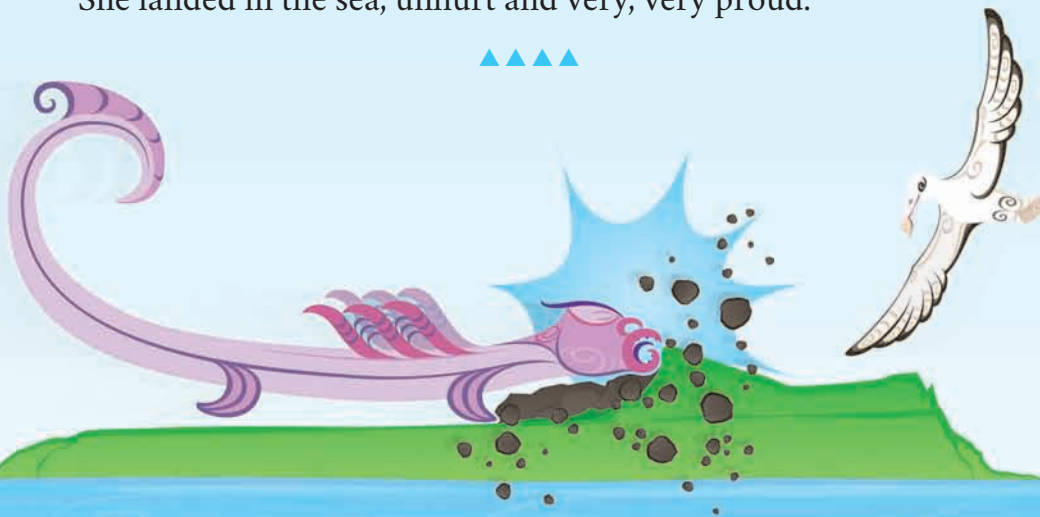
Awarua wanted to try again immediately. Rereroa wasn’t sure it was a good idea, but her friend kept pleading. Finally, Rereroa gave in.

“All right,” said Rereroa, “but this time, flap your wings hard right from the start. That way, you’ll take off earlier and get over Whitireia.”

Awarua did as her friend suggested, and this time she got over the mountain easily. She closed her eyes and gave a huge whoop of joy. She was so excited she didn’t see Mana Island in front of her. The taniwha ploughed into it with a mighty crash and slid right along the island, taking the top of it with her. She landed in the sea, unhurt and very, very proud.

Awarua continued to practise her flying. She never could travel the long distances that Rereroa could, but she was happy just being able to lift off into the sky.

Today, if you look at Whitireia, you will see the valley where the taniwha crashed. And if you look at Mana Island, you will see that its top is very flat. These features are the result of what happened all those years ago when Awarua the taniwha learnt to fly.



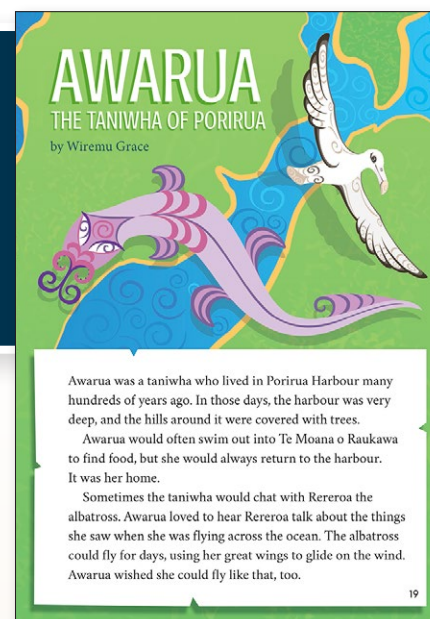
illustrations by Lee Watt

## GLOSSARY

kaimoana:	seafood
maunga:	mountain
pātaka:	larder, storeroom
Te Moana o Raukawa:	Cook Strait

# Awarua: The Taniwha of Porirua

by Wiremu Grace



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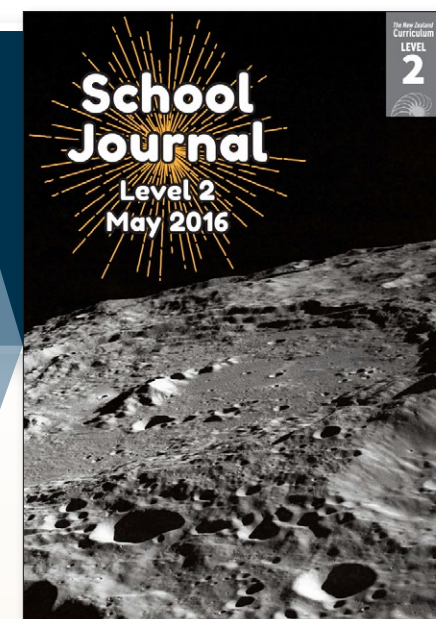
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