

Kāhu and Hōkioi

by Ariana Tikao

Long ago, birds ruled Aotearoa. You could hear the swoosh of their wings and see the flash of their colourful feathers everywhere. You could hear their calls and songs from dawn to sunset – and all night too. They were the tamariki of Tāne.

One of these tamariki of Tāne was the giant bird Hōkioi. This bird was very fierce. He had a crest on his head like a crown, and his feathers were a cloak of many colours. Hōkioi had sharp talons and a very strong grip. He hunted other birds, big and small. Sometimes he even caught moa!

Hōkioi would perch in tall trees or on high cliffs and search with his powerful eyes. When he saw a bird that looked good to eat, Hōkioi would swoop down and carry the poor creature off.

One day, Hōkioi was watching from the top of a tall tōtara tree and saw Kāhu the hawk drinking from a spring below. Hōkioi swooped down to grab Kāhu, but just in time, Kāhu heard him coming and hopped to the side. Hōkioi landed beside Kāhu with a thump. Kāhu was terrified. Auē! He didn't want to be the big bird's lunch, but Hōkioi was so close that Kāhu could not escape. He knew he had to be brave – and clever.



“You look so skinny and small,” boomed Hōkioi, “but you will make a tasty snack.”

Kāhu pretended that he hadn’t heard those last few words. “I may be small, but I can fly really high,” he squeaked.

“Hūūū! Is that right? Well, I don’t care how high you can fly,” said Hōkioi. “I can fly higher.”

“Ha!” said Kāhu. “I bet you can’t even fly as high as Mātātā*.”

Hōkioi was a very proud bird. When he heard what Kāhu had said, he became very angry. “I can fly higher than any other bird!” he boomed. “If you can fly higher than me, I will let you go.”

* Mātātā is a small bird that lives mostly on the ground and can’t fly well.



Then the giant bird took off. Kāhu followed him. The pair rose higher and higher, up towards the clouds. Kāhu looked down. The trees were getting smaller and smaller. Suddenly, he saw smoke rising up from one corner of the forest below. A fire! Kāhu knew small animals would be running to escape from the fire. He thought of his hungry children waiting at home. With a smile, he turned his back on Hōkioi and swooped back down towards the smoke. He felt the rush of air as he dived.

Hōkioi didn’t notice he was alone. He kept flying higher. He could still hear the words Kāhu had said: “I bet you can’t even fly as high as Mātātā.” Hōkioi kept on going upwards. Up and up, above the clouds.



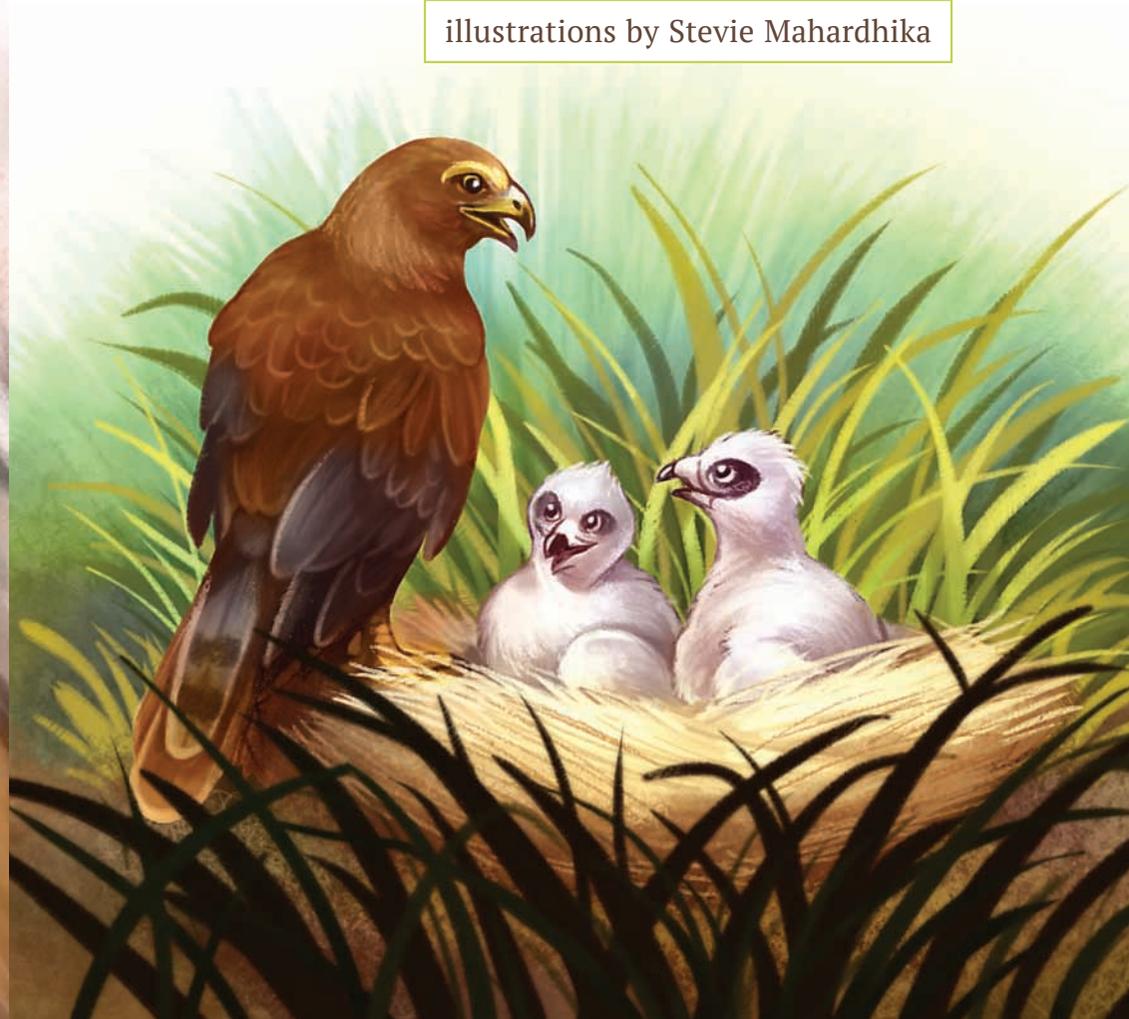
Kāhu held his breath and dived through the smoke. As he came out the other side, he saw a kiore running across the ground. He reached out and caught the big, heavy rat in his claws! Flapping hard to stay in the air, Kāhu turned towards his home and his hungry children.



The young birds ate while Kāhu told them of his adventures. He told them about racing Hōkioi, about the fire and the smoke, about catching the kiore. What a day!

And Hōkioi? He was never seen again. Perhaps he just kept flying higher and higher. Nobody knows for sure, but people say that sometimes you can hear his cry from high up in the sky “Hōkioi! Hōkioi! Hūūū”.

illustrations by Stevie Mahardhika



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