

Teachers' Resource Kit

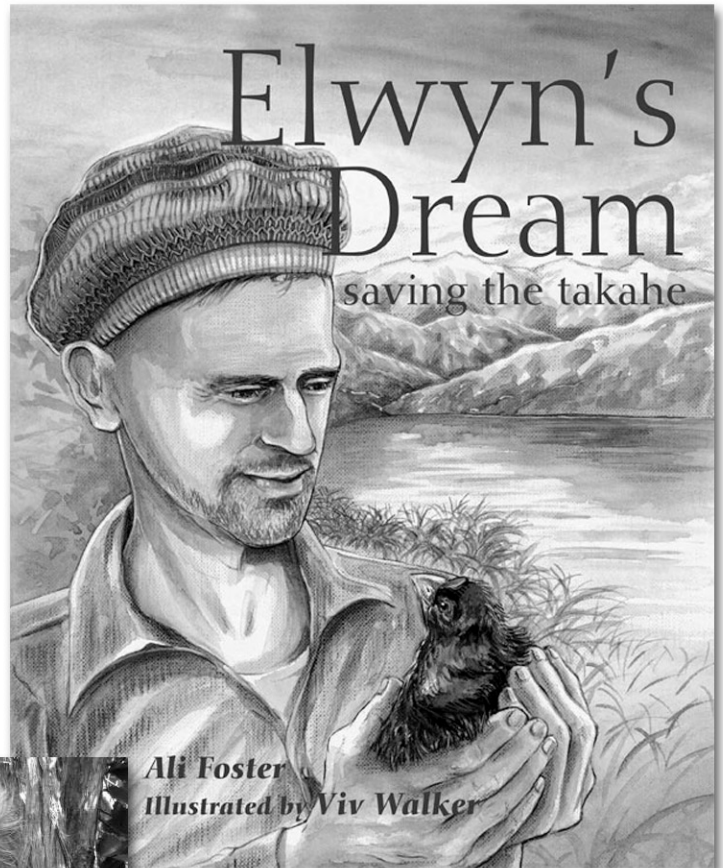
# Elwyn's Dream

Ali Foster

ALI FOSTER, winner of the **Mitre 10 Children's Short Story Writing Competition** based *Elwyn's Dream* on a true story. This charming, gently humorous story tells of the imaginative and persistent Elwyn Welch of Mount Bruce near Masterton who used his bantams to raise Takahe chicks in the 1950s. Eventually Elwyn's farm became the foundation of Pukaha/Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre. Illustrated by VIV WALKER – another Mitre 10 competition finalist – this is evocative of the 50s with gentle and finely wrought naturalistic illustration.

ALI FOSTER (pictured), mother of three and teacher's aide from Masterton, highlighted that she had been trying for decades to become a published author and this was proof that “if at first you don't succeed, try, try again. For this competition I spent ages researching different story angles and following all sorts of leads.”

VIV WALKER is an artist and graphic designer from Carterton. She also researched Elwyn Welch's story for her entry.



Notes include classroom activities for students aged 6-10, in the following areas:

- Reading Comprehension
- Exploring Illustrations
  - Medium
  - Point of View
- Creative Writing
- Extinction is Forever
- Protecting Endangered Birds
- Mapping
- Chickens
- Record-breaking Birds

*Teachers' notes developed by Raymond Huber*



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## Before Reading

- On the cover, what is the man holding?
- What do you know about the takahe?
- What do you think Elwyn's dream is?
- In which decade might this story be set?

## Introduction

Note: You may like to read the introduction after reading the story because it explains the plot.

- Who 'rediscovered' the takahe?
- Why do you think Elwyn's journey was a secret?
- Why would he take chickens with him?
- Try to define a 'predator-free environment'.
- From the introduction, say what DOC stands for, and what it does.
- Read [www.mtbruce.org.nz/DOC.htm](http://www.mtbruce.org.nz/DOC.htm) to find out when DOC began and what connection it has with Pukaha Mount Bruce.
- Define 'legislation'. Who makes it?
- What does a sponsor do? Why? Who sponsored the competition that this story won? (See back cover for answer.)

## Comprehension Questions

- What do takahe eat?
- Looking at the first picture, why do you think only one takahe is shown in the mountains?
- Can takahe fly? What hints does the story give about this?
- Why did the three men let the bird go again?
- How many years ago was this?
- List three reasons for the fall in the population of the takahe after its rediscovery.
- How might the deer and stoats have got to New Zealand?
- What kind of dream do you think Elwyn had: waking or sleeping?
- Look around Elwyn's kitchen. List the things that are different from today's household kitchen.

- What do the words and pictures tell you about bantams? Find out another fact about bantams.
- Why did Elwyn put hard-boiled eggs under the hen?
- Why did he take the bantams out on his tractor?
- What is a knapsack? (Look up a dictionary if you need to.)
- Why must the bantams stay on their nests 'no matter what'?
- Why was Elwyn training them with different eggs?
- Why would Elwyn and the men have crept into the tussock?
- What does 'iridescent' mean? (Look up a dictionary if you need to.) What other bird has iridescent feathers?
- Chicks must always be kept warm. Why do you think this is?
- Do you think Elwyn should have tried to save the takahe in this way?

## Exploring the Illustrations

### Medium

- Look closely at the pictures. Notice the small dots. What might they be?
- What might have been used to create the pictures? For example, water paints, pens, pastels or pencils? Or a combination of these?

### Point of View

- Changes in viewpoint are used in the illustrations:
1. Looking Up: this can be a frightening view.
    - Whose viewpoint is shown in the picture of the man photographing the takahe? How does this help us get closer to the takahe's feelings?

2. Looking Down: this gives an overview of the story.
  - Imagine you are a small ground bird. Draw a picture that shows your viewpoint looking up at a tramper.
  - Look at the picture of the red car driving down the South Island. What kind of perspective does it give on Elwyn's journey?
3. Eye level: this is the main character's viewpoint.
  - Look at the close-up of Elwyn's face talking to the hen. What does this close-up show us about the way Elwyn gets on with animals?

- Draw a close-up view of a friend's face, using the angle shown in the picture.

## Creative Writing

- Write a short fantasy story about an explorer discovering a rare bird with dangerous powers.

## Takahe

- Research the takahe. The Department of Conservation has facts on its website, [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz). Find out:
  - scientific name (two words — the genus and species)
  - family name
  - features of the takahe's body
  - where takahe live
  - how they nest
  - threats to takahe.
- The takahe has a strong beak and feet, and vivid wing colours. Parts of a takahe's body help it to survive in the mountains. The beak is used to get food; the feet to dig and climb; and the feathers to attract mates.
  - Draw a picture of a takahe and label the parts to show their main function (use).

## Extinction is Forever

- The arrival of humans in New Zealand led to the extinction of many birds, including the moa and eagle. Early Maori hunted birds for food and feathers. European settlers introduced predators such as cats, stoats, ferrets and weasels.
- Native birds were easy targets because they lived near the ground and had few defences. The laughing owl, bush wren and native thrush are species now lost forever.

- Humans cleared 90% of New Zealand's forests, which meant the destruction of homes for many birds.

True or False?

- Large birds became extinct after humans arrived. True / False
- Maori settlers brought stoats to New Zealand. True / False

- About 10% of New Zealand's native forests remain.

True / False

- Forests provide shelter for native birds. True / False

- Birds are not endangered today.

True / False

## Protecting Endangered Birds

- Endangered birds can be kept safe from predators on islands and in reserves. What other animals must first be removed from these islands?
- Some birds don't produce many babies and they need help to survive. Takahe and kakapo have special breeding programmes. Who does this work with native birds?
- Birds' homes are often disturbed by people. How should people behave near penguins on our beaches?
- Write and illustrate a 'Wanted' poster for one of these deadly bird predators — stoat, rat, ferret, feral cat. Information to research: description of the animal, what it kills, where it's found, and how to control it.
- Don Merton has done much to save endangered birds in New Zealand. He saved the black robin when there were only five left in the world! Read this amazing story in the picture book *Old Blue*.

## Mapping

- Draw a map of Fiordland. Sketch in the Murchison Mountains (the area where the takahe were found) and the boundaries of Fiordland National Park.
- Birds can be protected in predator-free reserves. Tiritiri Matangi Island is a world-famous reserve. It's a safe home for many rare and endangered birds. Find and label Tiritiri Matangi Island on

a map of the Waitemata Harbour of  
Auckland.

## Chickens

- Research some common breeds of chicken. Make a poster showing them.
- Divide a page into four sections and draw a chicken in the centre. Make notes (or illustrate) the following information:
  - food — what foods do chickens eat?
  - home — where do they like to live?
  - enemies — what or who is a threat to chickens?
  - defences — how do they protect themselves?
  - getting caught with egg on your face
  - coming home to roost
  - dumb cluck
  - hen party
  - chicken feed
  - henpecked
  - rule the roost
  - brooding over a problem
  - as scarce as hens' teeth.

### Language

- People have farmed chickens for thousands of years, so the English language has many sayings that feature chickens. Explain these sayings, giving their meaning. Find out what link they have to chickens:
  - to chicken out
  - fussy as an old hen
  - scratching out a living
  - walking on eggshells
- Illustrate these chicken proverbs with wacky cartoon characters:
  - Don't count your chickens before they're hatched
  - Don't put all your eggs in one basket.
- Find several answers for these famous chook riddles:
  - Why did the chicken cross the road?
  - Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

## Writing

- Write the diary of a day in the life of a chicken.
- Write an argument for or against factory (battery) farming of chickens.

## Record-breaking Birds

- Find out what is the . . .
  - World's smallest bird
  - World's largest bird
  - World's fastest bird
  - World's largest (heaviest) bird egg
  - Long distance flying record for birds.

## Information on Related Topics

### Websites

- [http://www.mtbruce.org.nz/takahe\\_more.htm](http://www.mtbruce.org.nz/takahe_more.htm)
- [http://www.mtbruce.org.nz/elwyn\\_welch\\_story.htm](http://www.mtbruce.org.nz/elwyn_welch_story.htm)

### Non-Fiction

- *A Bird in the Hand: Keeping New Zealand Wildlife Safe*, by Janet Hunt
- *Beautiful Birds of New Zealand*, by Rod Morris and Alison Ballance

### Picture Books

- *Kiwi Moon*, by Gavin Bishop
- *Tahi: One Lucky Kiwi*, by Melanie Drewery, Ali Teo and John O'Reilly

