

CONSERVATION HEROES

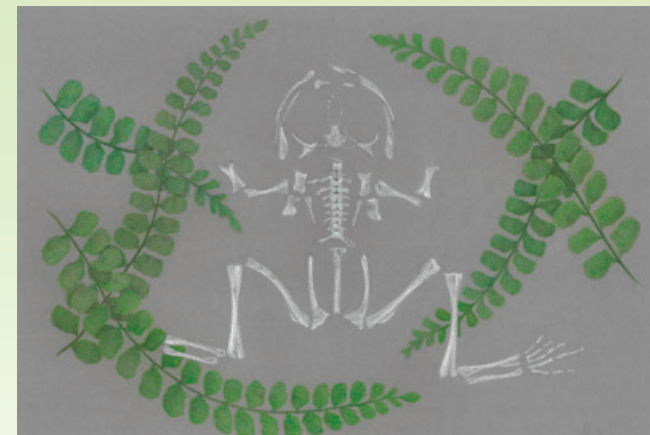


Did you know we have extinct NZ frogs? **Kelly Body** didn't know either until she came across them while studying at university. There weren't any pictures of them, so she decided to create some herself. What an amazing science-art project!

Before the arrival of humans, there were at least seven different species of pepeketua. Three species became extinct soon after the first introduction of kiore rats about 800 years ago: Markham's frog (*L. markhami*), the Aurora frog (*L. auroraensis*), and the Waitomo frog (*L. waitomoensis*).

Since then, it seems as though these animals have been left to the footnotes of history – they're rarely mentioned when any of us talk about Aotearoa's extinct species. There are no historical illustrations of them to be found, no alcohol preserved specimens, no photographs, and no mention of them in kōrero from iwi around the country. The only information we have is in a handful of scientific articles and several images of their recovered bones.

To get people talking about our lost frogs, I decided to recreate two species, the Waitomo and Aurora frog, through a series of artworks.



I read what scientists had said about the bones of these frogs and their DNA to help me slowly piece together what the skeletons of these animals would have looked like. I asked Dr Luke Easton to check my work was accurate, as he knows lots about our native frogs.

No one knows what their skin was like, so that bit was all up to my artistic choice. I thought I would come up with something unique, so I chose colours that I thought matched up to what their bones were telling us about where they had lived, and how they lived, and I gave them beautiful patterning.



Our Waitomo frog was the largest of all *Leiopelma* species, measuring 10cm in length, with long, slender hindlimbs but very short forearms. The North Island caves where bones were found and its long digits (toe bones) suggest it lived in or by streams and could hop, similar to Hochstetter's frog.

Our Aurora frog was much stockier in build. It was about 5cm long, with long, strong forearms and short hindlimbs built for walking about on the forest floor, rather than hopping. All the information on the Aurora frog comes from just one incomplete skeleton found in the Aurora Cave, in Fiordland.



I hope that my artworks help people feel a connection with our lost frogs and also with our surviving native frogs who keep holding on – even though they are in trouble. We can all find ways to help them!