The story of Kiwi

Once upon a time, the leaves of the great tree atua, Tāne Mahuta, were creating a big mess upon the ground. So he went to the tui to ask for its help, but the tui did not like the dark and besides, she was nesting. Tāne Mahuta became angry and threw two white pebbles at the tui, leaving white marks upon its neck.

So Tāne Mahuta went to the beautiful tieke (saddleback). “Will you help me?” he asked, but the tieke didn’t like that the ground was cold. Again Tāne Mahuta became annoyed so he burnt the tieke’s back, leaving behind two fiery red patches.

This left the kiwi. It was no secret really that Tāne Mahuta had a soft spot for kiwi and he was sure the bird would help. “Will you help me, kiwi?” he asked and the bird replied, “of course”. Tāne Mahuta was so touched by kiwi’s generosity that he offered to give it anything. “I’d dearly love to have a longer beak,” said kiwi, “that way I’d be able to hunt bugs – my favourite food – more easily”.

So Tāne Mahuta granted this wish, making his beak long and pointy, perfect for sniffing out insects in the damp, dark ground, and from then on kiwi became well-known as Tāne Mahuta’s favourite bird.

The story of Tuatara

Deep in what is now known as the Wairarapa, there was a peaceful community known as the village of Kōurarau. One day a woman arrived and sought an audience with the chief.

 “My chief, a great taniwha – a beast with scaly skin and evil yellow eyes – awoke from its slumber in the cave. He grew monstrous in size and broke free of the walls of its den, causing a great explosion we felt all the way in my village. As he made his way to my home, his great footsteps caused trees and the walls of ngā whare to fall”.

 “When he arrived, he ate everything he could, growing larger and larger as he did so. And then he left and I fear he may be heading this way”.

The chief thought for a moment then promised to send his greatest warriors after the taniwha they called ngānara huarau.

As they searched, they came across a colossal footprint in the ground which was so large that it dwarfed even the largest warrior.

They then came across the taniwha’s new lair in the Kōurarau Valley and from there hatched a plan. They used a kurī, their bravest dog, to stand near the entrance of the cave to lure out the taniwha. As soon as the beast smelt the dog, he lunged out but the dog was too fast, running for all its worth towards the carefully hidden warriors.

The taniwha falls into the warriors’ trap and, without a moment to spare, they were upon him, piercing his hide with their spears. The fiercest warrior, Tūpurupuru, then rushed forwards and struck it with a fatal blow.

The taniwha was defeated.

Meanwhile, back in the cave, the tiny scales that had fallen as the taniwha had broken free of its tiny former home, flickered to life and the first tuatara were born. (Pukaha)

Matakauri Slays the Giant of Wakatipu

Long ago, before the promise of gold brought Pakeha to Otago, the Maori roamed the land, hunting for moa and greenstone and eels. Manata and Matakauri, two star-crossed lovers, lived in a village in the area. The couple were not allowed to marry as Manata was the daughter of the chief, and Matakauri was a commoner.

One night, a giant taniwha named Matau stole into the village and kidnapped Manata. He carried her away to his lair in the hills and tied her to him with a magical cord.

Manata’s father was distraught. He asked the young men of the village to go and save Manata, offering her in marriage to whoever brought her home safely. The young men were afraid, but Matakauri, who loved Manata with all his heart, followed the nor-west wind to the still-young mountains where the giant lived. He found Matau asleep, with Manata lashed next to him.

When Matakauri was unable to cut the enchanted cords, Manata begged him to go, fearing that the giant would wake up and kill him. Matakauri refused to leave her; but as Manata began to cry, the love in her tears dissolved her bonds, and they escaped.

Matakauri brought Manata back to the village, and the couple were allowed to be married. Later, fearing that Matau would return to cause more trouble, Matakauri went back to the mountains where the monster lived. He found the giant sleeping, lulled by the warm wind, and he set a great fire around him. The hot wind caused the flames to roar violently; the taniwha’s body burned so long and so hot that a trough hundreds of metres deep and 75 kilometres long was created.

After Matakauri left, the rains came and filled the newly formed valley with water, which is now known as Wakatipu, the trough of the giant. Although the giant has been dead for many long years, his heartbeat can still be seen in the steady rise and fall of the beautiful lake that is his resting place.

According to the legend, Lake Wakatipu rests in the trough formed by Matau’s burning body, Glenorchy at his head, Kingston at his feet and Queenstown resting on his knee. His ever-beating heart – the only part of him remaining – is under Pigeon Island and causes the seiche which makes the level of the lake rise and fall regularly and rhythmically.

The legend of the seven whales

A powerful tohunga (priest) lived at Waiatai and in his care were seven whales named Tahutoria, Takitaki, Korito, Onepoto, Iwitea, Korotere and Hikunui. Their daily task was to swim the ocean to seek out news and relay it back to the tohunga each evening. In return the tohunga provided a safe home for the whales at Waiatai where they slept. The tohunga only had one rule for the whales which was that they were to be out in the open sea before sunrise.

The seven whales would gather news from the other sea creatures, many of whom had travelled great distances and spoke of people and lands far away. Every evening the seven whales returned to Waiatai and would relay their discoveries to the tohunga. The older whales would be exhausted after a long journey at sea and slept well. Being the youngest and smallest of the whales, Hikunui did not travel as far as his brothers. Hikunui would be wide awake and would chatter to himself late into the night.

One dawn as the whales were heading out to sea the four brothers Tahutoria, Takitaki, Korito and Onepoto checked to make sure they were all together. They could only see Iwitea and Korotere behind them. They then realised Hikunui had slept-in so they turned around to fetch their baby brother. But at that moment the sun rose and the tohunga discovered the whales were not at sea. The tohunga cursed the seven brothers and turned them instantly into solid earth.

Citations

I found the story of 'Kiwi' and 'Tuatara' on the <a href="https://pukaha.org.nz/two-maori-legends-from-our-forest/">Pukaha National Wildlife Centre website</a>

I found the story of the seven whales, as well as the image of Korito, on the <a href="https://freshwaterimprovementfundwhakaki.wordpress.com/nga-korero/">Fresh Water Improvement Whakaki website</a>

I found the story of Matakauri on the <a href="https://www.southerndiscoveries.co.nz/latest/the-legend-of-lake-wakatipu/">Southern Discoveries website</a>. The image is used with the permission of NZ Post.

The image of the taniwha of Lake Taupo has been <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Taniwha\_rock\_carving\_from\_the\_side\_(Lake\_Taupo).jpg">released by the owner into the public domain</a>

The image of Lake Wakitipu was found on the <a href="https://eichardts.com/the-maori-legend-of-lake-wakatipu">website of Eichardt's Private Hotel</a>

The image of the saddleback was taken from the <a href="https://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/north-island-saddleback">New Zealand Birds online website</a>

The image of the tui was taken from the <a href="https://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/tui">New Zealand Birds online website</a>

Images















