

What do kiwi eat?

This task is about science investigations.

What do Kiwi Eat?

How do scientists find out what kiwi eat? They might think they eat worms and insects but it's difficult to be sure. Sometimes scientists might be lucky enough to see a kiwi probing around in the ground for food, but it throws food down its throat (gullet) from its beak so quickly that it's impossible to see what it has eaten.



Picture source: www.mtbruce.org.nz



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The best way to find out is to collect kiwi droppings (poo). This is easy if there are only kiwi around in an area. However, if there are other similar birds around such as weka it could be confusing.

To find out what kiwi ate, scientists had to carry out an investigation.

There are 4 important steps in an investigation:

1. **Focusing and planning:** Asking questions to direct the investigation
2. **Finding information:** Carrying out the investigation, gathering all the data and checking it
3. **Analysis:** Looking carefully at the data and thinking about what it means
4. **Reporting:** Sharing what they found out

Most of what we now know comes from scientists who work with the kiwi recovery and preservation programme. When kiwi are caught to be weighed and tagged they are put in bags. The kiwi often produce droppings while they are in these bags. The droppings are collected from the bags and checked carefully under a microscope to see what the kiwi has been eating.

In the droppings they have found hard mouth parts of insects and spiders. The mouth parts are different depending on the type of insect or spider. They've also found bits of the waxy coating of different fruits. All these are examined under a microscope to decide which insects and which fruits are being eaten. The scientists then present the findings from their investigation to other people in a variety of ways.

a) Read the article again and write in the table to show what the scientists did at each stage of their investigation.

What scientists do	Kiwi investigation
Focusing and planning	
Finding information	
Analysis	
Reporting	

b) Why might it be useful for scientists to know what kiwi eat?

c) When scientists report on what they did, they often explain their reasons for carrying out an investigation in the way they did.

i) In this investigation why didn't scientists just rely on observing the kiwi eating?

ii) In this investigation why didn't scientists just pick up droppings from the ground?

iii) What problems do you think scientists might have had carrying out this investigation?

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