

## E Tū Whānau Kahukura

E Tū Whānau Kahukura are the people who **inspire change** in whānau and communities.



They emerge naturally in whānau, hapū, iwi and communities as people who **support, encourage, and strengthen whānau by modelling values, behaviours and actions that are the positive ‘footprints’ that can be followed.**

Kahukura:

- actively create environments in which whānau are strong, safe, and prosperous
- model the six E Tū Whānau values in their personal lives, as well as within their own whānau, marae and / or communities
- provide leadership to the people and groups around them
- recognise and support other leaders emerging across Aotearoa.

The importance of Kahukura – and their commitment to making a difference – is recognised and supported by E Tū Whānau.

**Resources about E Tū Whānau Kahukura:**

- **[Kahukura – Community leaders inspiring change](#)** – a short, animated explanation of the kahukura concept and its place within E Tū Whānau kaupapa.
- **[Waka kuaka](#)**, a taonga pūoro piece which tells the story of kuaka.
- **[E Tū Whānau Ann Dysart Kahukura Award 2022](#)** – highlights of celebration and recognition of positive community leadership from across Aotearoa.

**About the name Kahukura**

In 2011, a group of kaumātua at the Iwi Leaders’ Forum in Waitangi came up with the name Kahukura to describe **the leaders of change within whānau, hapū and iwi.**

The origin of the name lies in the story of the Kuaka (Bar-tailed Godwit). When they fly into Aotearoa for the summer, Kuaka arrive in a swirling mass. Within that mass are small groups that each have a leader whose role is to cleave the air and provide the initial lift for those in their flock who are following. That lead bird, **the Kahukura, provides the impetus for movement and change** – as they move, they gather their group around them and, in doing so, other leaders emerge.

**Within E Tū Whānau, the name Kahukura describes people from different whānau, hapū and iwi across Aotearoa New Zealand who provide inspiration, leadership, and support to whānau and communities. It symbolises the collective strength required to undertake long, difficult journeys to reach destinations and attain goals that will sustain the wellbeing of future generations.**

*Te mana kaha o te whānau  
The strength and power of whānau*

## Te hitori o te Kuaka

Arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand in spring, and leaving in autumn to breed in Alaska, Kuaka (Bar-tailed godwits) were historically birds of mystery in Māori oral tradition.



***Ko wai i kite te Kohanga o te kuaka?  
Who has seen the nest of the kuaka?***

Kuaka also denoted the unobtainable.

***Ko wai i mau te hua o te kuaka?  
Who has ever held the egg of the kuaka?***

Murdoch Riley records that “the lineage of the kuaka starts with Karihi, grandson of Tangaroa, the god of fish. He is its father, and Kwaitara its mother. These two are the parents of all seabirds that fly in flocks like kuaka, tara and torea. In the formative period of living creatures on this earth, it is said to have been the task of the godwit family to fly to the furthest seas to call together all seabirds to fight for a share of the harvest of river fish claimed by land birds.”

According to some Māori traditions:

- it was believed that kuaka came from, or at least passed through Hawaiiiki, the ancestral home of all Māori
- a place where kuaka gather was called a *tahuna a tapu* - a sacred sandbank
- flocks of kuaka were referred to as *hau te kapakapa* - the flapping wind
- large flocks of kuaka on the move are known as *waka kuaka*
- male kuaka were called *Pohokura* and females were *Kuaka-karoro*.

One ancient whakatauki depicts Kuaka as the thousands of chips that flew off the adzes of tāne as they carved waka:

***Te mana kaha o te whānau  
The strength and power of whānau***

***Ka kitea te rere maramara! Me te pukai kuaka***  
***Like a godwit flock seeing the flight of chips!***

According to the traditions of Ngāti Awa and Ngāi Tāhu, among others, kuaka led Kupe and the first waka to Aotearoa. The cries of kuaka are loud as they fly along. During daylight, the ancestors followed the course of the kuaka in their canoes, secure in the knowledge that land must lie somewhere ahead of them since Kuaka are not able to land on water. During the night, the ancestors were guided by the cries of the Kuaka overhead.

**References**

Woodley, K. (2009). *Godwits Long-haul Champions New Zealand to the World – One Bird's Voyage*. Penguin.