



The location of the boarding house I'm staying at is very residential. It's a 15-minute drive to anything interesting. I've been taking the bus most places, which can double that time. But that gives me plenty of commute time to enjoy the Auckland scenery of the cute old bungalow houses and some very modern buildings.

The first far off place I made it to was the Auckland Zoo. It was a very interactive experience with some educational value and of course lots of fun animals that I had never seen before.

On the way into the zoo, a family of swans was sitting peacefully in the parking lot. Throughout the zoo paths, chickens and their baby chicks roamed free. It seemed like their favorite spot to hang out was around the café, where people fed them fries and pieces of bread. I have seen people feeding birds throughout Auckland. The pigeons here are actually brightly colored and look plump and healthy, but I think the biggest difference is that they are much nicer to each other, I guess because there is much less competition for food and shelter.

Of course I got to see lions and tigers, zebra and giraffes, flamingos and elephants. But I was surprised at how many of the bird exhibits I could just walk into. After walking through a set of two doors to make sure the birds don't come and go with the people, I got to stand inside the large nets that hold the different birds. In one exhibit of beautiful, big, green, native birds called Kea, one of the birds flew up behind me, so close I could feel its' wings blow my hair around, and landed on the railing next to me. The signs warning that the Kea are known to bite almost got to me, but I stayed a while to snap a picture. Fortunately, the bird turned out to be very calm and very photogenic.

I was also surprised at how open the cages were for the Australian animals. When I say "cage," I mean single wooden railing that I could have easily jumped. And this was all that separated me from the wallabies and the emu. If I was braver, I could have petted them, but the noises were interesting enough. I had no idea what sound an emu makes, but I found out that it is a deep sort of knocking sound. At first I mistook the noise for far off construction. Emus are definitely unique birds.

I had to go to the kiwi exhibit twice to finally see one. I learned that kiwi birds are nocturnal, and becoming endangered due largely to dog attacks. The kiwis at the zoo are tucked away in a building that simulates nighttime. It was hard enough to see anything in the dark, let alone an animal I'd never seen before in an exhibit full of plants and other hiding places. Just before I left the zoo, though, the keepers put food out for the kiwis, and I got to see one come right

up to the glass. I knew they are flightless birds, but they don't look like they have wings at all. They have incredibly long bills and very small heads compared to their bodies. I couldn't see the color of the kiwi in the dark, but the signs said it was a dark brown. I'm hoping that once I visit some more rural areas, I might get to see a wild kiwi, and gain a better understanding of New Zealand wildlife in general.