The birth of Maui

Maui’s mother was the goddess Taranga. She gave birth to him prematurely. Thinking he was dead she wrapped him in a tuft of her hair and threw him into the sea foam.

Soon birds, jellyfish and flies gathered around the small corpse.

Maui’s ancestor TamanuikiteRangi saw the birds gathering and went to investigate what attracted them. He took the small embryo from the sea and brought it home. He then hung him up on the roof of his house so that the heat of the fire would warm him.

Thus Maui survived.

Maui meets his mother and brothers

Maui discovered his mother and his brothers when he was still an infant.

One night they were all dancing in the House of Assembly. The infant Maui came in and hid behind one of his four brothers.

When their mother came over to call her sons to join the dancing she noticed that there were five of them there instead of four. She called Maui out and asked him who he was. He told her he was her youngest son.

At first she did not believe him but he told her about how he was thrown into the sea wrapped in a tuft of her hair. He then told her how he knew all of his brothers’ names because he heard her calling them when he was still in her womb. When he correctly recited all of their names she finally recognised him as her son.

With great joy she named him MauitikitikiaTaranga, or Maui-formed-in-the-top-knot-of-Taranga. He became her favourite child and she took him to sleep with her every night.

Maui discovers why his mother leaves him during daytime

Maui quickly discovered that his mother left him and his brothers early every morning and never returned until night had fallen. Unlike his brothers, Maui was very curious about where his mother disappeared to every day.

One night, once his mother fell asleep Maui got up and stole his mother's apron, her belt, and clothes, and hid them. Next he went and stopped up every crevice in the wooden window, and in the doorway, so that the light of the dawn might not shine into the house.

His plan worked and the sum was almost at its zenith when his mother woke. In panic she searched for her clothes but could not find them. She had to use a flax cloak that stopped the doorway to cover herself.

Watched by the curious Maui she left the house and ran towards a tuft of rushes. Here she stopped and lifted up the rushes, thus revealing an opening in the ground. She lowered herself into this opening and pulled down the tuft of rushes to conceal the opening.

Maui opened up the opening again to discover it was the entrance to a beautiful cave.

Now that he had discovered why his mother disappeared during daytime, his next quest was to find out where she went to.

Maui meets his Father

Maui changed himself into a Kereru in order to follow his mother. At the time he was wearing his mother’s apron and belt which gave the kereru its white breast feathers and the fastening of her belt gave the kereru the darker feathers at its throat.

Once in the form of a bird he opened up the covering of rushed that hid the entrance to the cave. He then closed the covering behind him and flew through the narrow cave. Eventually the cave widened and he came to a grove of manapau trees. A group of people were sitting beneath the same trees. He then saw his mother and father sitting with the group.

Maui pecked off a berry and dropped on his father’s head. His father, however, did not react. He therefore continued to drop berries onto both his father and mother until his father and the rest of the group became angry. All of them jumped up and began throwing stones at him, but Maui easily avoided them.

His father then threw a stone at him and struck him on the left leg causing him to fall from the tree onto the ground. The people rushed towards him to kill him but Maui changed himself back to human form. The people were frightened of him but his mother recognised him and introduced him to his father.

Maui acquires the magic Jawbone

While staying with his mother and father Maui discovered the people daily carried gifts of food to some person. When he asked who this person was he was told that it was his ancestress, Murirangawhenua. Maui requested that he be allowed to carry the gifts of food to her.

From that day on carried the gifts of food but he never gave them to Murirangawhenua. After a while Murirangawhenua became suspicious. The next time Maui was coming along the path she thought she smelled a human. She tried sniffing the winds from the four quarters but she could not detect any until she sniffed the west wind. She detected that from this quarter some close to her was arriving.

When he came close to her she asked him why he had tricked her. He answered that he wanted her magic jawbone and her answer was “Take it. It was reserved for you.

Maui slows the Sun

Maui had noticed that the sun travelled too fast through the sky. For this reason people had not enough time to complete their daily tasks. He suggested to his brothers that they should attack the sun and make him slow down to give people more time.

His brothers first ridiculed him but eventually he persuaded them to help him.

They began spinning flax ropes to form a noose for the sun. This way they discovered how to spin stout square shaped ropes, flat ropes and round ropes.

Once they were finished the took up their ropes and other provisions. Maui also took the jawbone of his ancestress Murirangawhenua. They travelled eastwards by night and hid during the day in case the sun would see them. After a very long journey they came to the place out of which the sun rises.

They made a high wall of clay to hide themselves from the sun and then laid a noose of ropes around the pit out of which it was to rise.

When the sun arose they allowed his head and forepaws to get into the noose and then they pulled the ropes tight. Maui now rushes towards the sun and with his magic jawbone delivers many blows until the sun is weakened.

Once they were happy that the sun was now weaker than before the released him and from then on he travelled slower across the sky.

Maui pulls up Te Ika

The North Island breaks the waves

After defeating the sun Maui rested at home for a long time doing nothing. His wives and children began to complain that he was not catching any fish for them. After a while he promised them that he would catch a fish for them so big that it would have gone putrid before they could eat it all.

So Maui sharpened his fishing hook with the jawbone of Murirangawhenua and then attached a strong fishing line to it.

Meanwhile his brothers prepared their canoe for fishing but when Maui came along they would not let him aboard. This is because they were afraid of his magic tricks and enchantments.

Maui waited until his brothers came ashore with the catch. That night he hid in the canoe under the bottom boards. His brothers did not know he was there until they were out at sea the following morning.

At first his brothers wanted to turn back and put Maui ashore. Maui used his magic to make the shoreline more and more distant. The brothers finally yielded to him and sailed to the fishing grounds. Maui however suggested they sail further out where bigger fish was found. This happened a number of times until they reached the place that Maui wanted.

Once they let down their lines they caught some very large fish, just as Maui promised. They decided they had enough fish and wanted to return back. Maui however that he wanted to let his line down.

He felt a strong pull on his line. Maui began uttering incantations because he knew that the fish was very heavy. With the power of the incantations Maui pulled upTe Ika A Maui, the North Island of Aotearoa.

Maui brings Fire

Maui wanted to find out where fire comes from. First he put out all of the fires in his village. The next morning people were afraid as there was no fire in any household. The fire goddess Mahuika had fire put people were afraid to go to her abode.

At last Maui said he would visit the fire goddess and ask her for fire. When Maui reached her abode Mahuika asked who he was. When she found out he was her grandson she promised to gave him fire.

o give him fire she pulled off one of her fingers, which was aflame and he took it with him. When he left her abode he put the fire out. He then returned and asked for another flame. Mahuika pulled off another fingernail and gave it to him. He departed and again put out the fire.

He repeated this trick until she had one toenail left. When he came back for this one Mahuika realised that he had tricked her. In her anger she pulled off her last toenail and dashed it down in front of him. The entire place caught fire!

Maui ran but the fire followed him and to escape he turned himself into a kahu and soared into the sky. The fire still followed him and singed his wings.

He then dived towards a river but the water was boiling. Finally he called on Tawhirimatea who sent down squalls of rain the quench the fires.

Mahuika was beaten but still angry. She took up the remaining toenail and threw it at Maui. It missed him but embedded itself in the Tōtara, the Patete, the Pukatea, and the Kaikōmako trees.

Since then those trees are the best at producing fire.

Citations

All of the Maui legends on this page are abbreviated versions of the legends that appear in <strong>Maori Religion and Mythology Part 2</strong> by Elsdon Best which have been archived in <a href="http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-Bes02Reli-t1-body-d4-d5-d2.html">The New Zealand Electronic Text Collection</a>

The portrait of Hone Heke and his wife wearing flax cloaks is part of the <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HoneHeke1845.jpg">Wikimedia Commons</a>

the image of the Kerehu is part of the <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kereru\_perched\_on\_kowhai\_at\_Otari\_Native\_Botanic\_Garden.jpg">Wikimedia Commons</a>

The image of the Manapu Tree is from the National Botanical Gardens, Apia, Samoa and was downloaded from the <a href="http://www.temarareo.org/PPN-Manapau.html">te mara reo website</a>

The image of Maui and his brothers taming the sun is from the marae at Te Papa

The image of Maui pulling up Te Ika is presented with the permission of NZ Post.

The image of Mahuika, by Peter Gossage is from the <a href="https://teara.govt.nz/en/artwork/5185/mahuika-and-her-fingernails-of-fire">Te Ara website</a>.

Image of the Harrier is from <a href="https://www.wingspan.co.nz/birds\_of\_prey\_native\_new\_zealand\_swamp\_harrier.html">Wingspan National Bird of Prey Centre website</a>

The image of the Totara tree was <a href="https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PodocarpusTotara2.jpg">released into the public domain by it's author Kahuroa</a>

The image of the scorching mountain was from the <a href="https://www.britannica.com/science/volcano/Mauna-Loa-Hawaii-1984">Britannica website and shows Mauna Loa erupting in 1984</a>

Alexander Turnbull Library Reference: A-269-012 Watercolour by Frederick Aloysius Weld

Image of the fishing hook was downloaded from <a href="https://www.fishing.net.nz/fishing-advice/general-articles/maori-fishing-techniques/">The fishing website: Fishing knowledge online</a>.

Images





















