

# FOREST AND BIRD CONSERVATION.

## NEED OF ACTIVE NATIONAL POLICY.

IT has been said of New Zealanders that they are a peculiar people, over-prone to accept as facts whatever they are told or read. This accusation can be said to be near the mark in regard to the conservation of forests and wild life. Some few years back we were frequently told by those in charge of forestry matters that New Zealand led the world in forestry. Nay, even the then Prince of Wales was induced in some way to hold up this country as a model in forest practice. But what has been the outcome to date? Some hundreds of thousands of acres have been planted, mostly in the exotic insignis pine or radiata, the timber from which is certainly useful for such purposes as boxing for concrete work or fruit cases and similar needs, provided always that the plantations are not so far distant from the place of utilisation as to make the cost of transport prohibitive, but it is not of a nature suitable for much else.

On the other hand, our native forests have been slaughtered by very unscientific methods, regardless of their necessity for protection purposes; in fact, this primary need received scarcely any consideration until recent years, when the plea was first made by the Forest and Bird Protection Society, but to this day adequate areas for the protection of our food-producing lands have not been officially set aside.

Since its inception the State Forest Service has employed few specially trained officers. In fact, not more than two such have ever been in the service as far as can be ascertained. Yet we hear of the necessity for scientific forestry, silviculture, etc., and it is feared that most people take such statements as indicating knowledge. Now warnings such as the Esk Valley floods and other disasters are sounded as indicating what may be expected in an ever-increasing volume as the result of the depletion of the natural plant covering on watershed lands.

Fifteen years ago the Forest and Bird Protection Society pointed out the failure in New Zealand of wild-life administration, especially in the enforcement of the various Acts relating to it. To-day we repeat the accusation, which is supported by reports of the shooting of native pigeons and other breaches of the law which continue to come from many districts in both the North and South Islands. Numbers of pigeons are shot in localities which are particularly favourable for their increase in the natural course.

A strong public feeling has been awakened for the need of efficient conservation of New Zealand's unique plant and bird life. Unfortunately many people, when they hear the extensive lip service which is given to the subject, think that all is well. The truth is just the opposite. Action, long over-due, is still delayed. The poaching of native birds will continue, game and fish stocks will go on lessening, and erosion and floods will continue to exact their devastating toll, until a proper national policy is formulated and put into operation.

The Maoris practised conservation of both tree and bird with excellent results. The North American Indians and most other aboriginal races had their conservation laws and enforced them; New Zealanders have laws on paper and seem to be content to go no further. After all, perhaps they really are a peculiar people.