

MANAGEMENT OF SANCTUARIES

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NEED OF IMPROVEMENT

A SANCTUARY, according to the dictionary, is "a sacred place," "A place of refuge." Many sanctuaries in New Zealand are set aside under the Animals Protection and Game Act, 1921-22, solely for the purpose of attempting to save the indigenous flora and fauna. Under other Acts, principally in those areas reserved under the Scenery Preservation Act, 1908, Forests, 1921, Public Reserves, Domains and National Parks Act, it is illegal to take, kill or hunt birds.

Let us, however, consider the position of those areas which have so wisely been set aside solely as sanctuaries for the preservation of native flora and fauna. As these reservations are specially marked for that purpose, no other use should be allowed.

Many may say: "What is the use of having sanctuaries if the people are not allowed to visit the area to see the birds?" The answer to this is that the primary object must receive full consideration before all others in order that the bird population of the area may have untrammelled freedom to increase and thus be compelled to overflow to other areas where the conditions of food and other factors have been rendered equally suitable for the species existing on the sanctuary. Thus the public will have the opportunity of seeing the birds if they encourage their presence elsewhere.

Therefore, keeping in mind the purpose of a sanctuary, it must be realised that it is no place for the tourist, the picnicker, the sightseer or the scientifically curious. Only those concerned in the administration should have access. Birds and plants mostly require peace, especially the birds during the nesting period.

Most so-called sanctuaries in New Zealand have no resident warden, and therefore are only nominal sanctuaries. A warden is one of the first needs. He may require some domestic stock, but these should be restricted to his personal requirements and securely confined to an area set apart for the purpose. Otherwise all exotic creatures should be prohibited and eliminated as far as possible.

Moreover, a sanctuary, to be worthwhile, should be restricted to the flora and fauna indigenous to its locality, but unfortunately in

New Zealand the desire always appears to be to introduce birds or plants that are foreign to the area.

There are good reasons why certain species of fauna and flora were originally restricted by Nature to certain areas only, and this is of much importance scientifically. Therefore, why not adopt the modern method of making a sanctuary of the place where any threatened species is attempting its final stand rather than further risk its existence by transporting it to a foreign environment where its annual routine of food supply probably does not exist? If the necessary food did exist, and the bird or plant had the means of transporting itself or its seed, it would surely have established itself there in past ages. Any successful introduction of a species foreign to the area must inevitably be to the detriment of the existing chain of life and cause it to be violently disorganised and compel nature to re-stabilise perhaps the whole chain.

Collectors, camouflaging their real purpose under the umbrella of scientific purposes, should receive scant consideration where sanctuaries are concerned. Their real purpose is only too often personal acquisition of the skins or eggs of rare birds or rare plants.

No interference with the operations of any natural enemy should be countenanced except under extraordinary circumstances and only after the most careful expert investigation. Such predators are not a mistake of nature but an essential to the maintenance of the virility of a species. Exotic enemies such as cats, rats, and weasels should be vigorously destroyed.

Much assistance can be given the bird population of the sanctuary by extensive winter artificial feeding, the provision of bird bathing places and, in some cases, the setting up of suitable artificial nesting places.

No single sanctuary in New Zealand can yet be considered as being administered on truly satisfactory lines for the purpose for which it was set aside. On only two are there resident wardens and in the case of Little Barrier, one of these, and probably the most successful owing to its configuration and inaccessibility—there is much room for improvement in the management.