

For many years the Wildlife Service has maintained a captive group of birds and attempts have been made to breed them. This is a safeguard against the possible loss of the wild population. However, with limited breeding success of the captive population so far, the major effort in conserving this species must still be undertaken in Fiordland.

Need to retain all takahe habitat

For reasons given above it is essential that all available takahe habitat in Fiordland be retained and managed for the conservation of takahe. The amount of ideal takahe habitat is limited and is predominantly in and around the Murchison Mountains, including a small area to the south in the Kepler Mountains and in parts of the Wapiti Block. Soon after the rediscovery of takahe in 1948 a 250-square mile area incorporating the Murchison Mountains was gazetted a Special Area with restricted access. It seems a large area, but in fact only 30 square miles contains adequate amounts of the required food plants on suitable terrain. Furthermore, not even all of the 30 square miles is entirely suitable for takahe, because the nutritional quality of the food plants in many areas is inadequate to support successful breeding.

The largest area of takahe habitat outside the Murchison Mountains exists in the Wapiti Block. A recent survey of this area revealed that 39 percent of the above tree-line area is potentially suitable as takahe habitat. Takahe were once well represented in areas of the Wapiti Block, but now only a few pairs remain. The areas of potentially suitable takahe habitat in the Wapiti Block will be used for future takahe liberations, provided that the habitat quality is enhanced by



John H. Johns photo

A wapiti cow and calf standing among luxuriant flowering *Chionochloa pallens* tussocks.

deer-wapiti control to reduce the browsing pressure.

Removal of wapiti supported

The Wildlife Service supports the removal of wapiti because the reduction of browsing pressure will preserve and enhance the habitat needed for takahe.

The New Zealand Deerstalkers Association made representations to Parliament to have the Wapiti Block set aside as an area to be managed for wapiti. The management practices required would be in conflict with the management of the area for takahe and so naturally the Wildlife Service must oppose this proposal. It must be emphasised, however, that the Wildlife Service has no intention of increasing the size of the Special Area to incorporate the Wapiti Block.

Some correspondents to newspapers and some editors have expressed the view that takahe should be moved from Fiordland and wapiti retained. Where is the sense of priorities? Takahe is an endemic, critically endangered species and the wapiti is introduced and not endangered in its country of

origin. The relocation of a species like deer, which is able to tolerate a wide range of habitat types, is a relatively safe procedure, but for species with very specific habitat requirements (that is, the most endangered species) there is always an element of uncertainty as to whether the animal will adapt to the new environment or not.

The plan to shift kakapo and takahe to predator-free islands has nothing to do with administrative or research convenience; it is an attempt to safeguard the species from extinction and is undertaken alongside efforts to preserve the species in its natural habitat.

The takahe is an integral part of the alpine tussock grassland ecosystem in Fiordland. It makes its own unique contribution to the functioning of that system by its method of feeding, which actually promotes tillering or new growth of tussock shoots. We believe that it has the potential to survive in its present habitat and that the major thrust of conserving the species should aim at maintaining it in Fiordland. ■