

TUSSOCK GRASSLANDS, MOUNTAINLANDS AND RIVERS — 60th JUBILEE YEAR NOVEMBER COUNCIL MEETING



Professor Kevin O'Connor describing the natural and cultural history of the high country at Porter's Pass.

Photograph: A. F. Mark.

Society attention focused on the tussock grasslands and braided rivers of the eastern South Island at the Council meeting held in Christchurch from 18–20 November.

Natural areas of national importance

These natural areas cover nearly a third of the South Island. They incorporate distinctive landscapes (eg Kaikoura Ranges, Mackenzie Basin) special plant species (eg Kaikoura Rock Daisy, Castle Hill Buttercup) and interesting and rare animals (eg Otago giant lizards, black stilt, wrybill). Despite much of this land being in public ownership, few of its natural and scenic values have any permanent protection.

The wrybill — endemic bird under threat

Society Councillors from throughout New Zealand gathered at the University of Canterbury on 18 November. Attention focused that evening on the plight of the wrybill. Ken Hughey of Lincoln College, who is studying wrybills which breed in Canterbury's braided riverbeds, described the adaptations of this bird to its hostile breeding habitat. He also criticised naturalists for forgetting ecosystems such as braided rivers with their specially adapted plants and animals.

High country field trip

The Council group of eighty were joined next day by eighty members from Mid-Canterbury and Canterbury branches for a trip into the Rakaia and Waimakariri Basins. At Porters Pass (970m altitude) we sheltered from blasting nor-westers amongst snow tussocks, and *Dracophyllum* while Professor Kevin O'Connor from Lincoln College described