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Cover: Few dunes covered in native vegetation remain today. Pingao (*Desmoschoenus spiralis*) covered dunes once dominated Tautuku beach, South East Otago shown here, but pingao has now been ousted by introduced marram grass.
Photograph: A. F. Mark

Journal of the Royal Forest & Bird
Protection Society of New Zealand Inc.
ISSN 0015—7384

Forest & Bird is published quarterly by the
Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society of
New Zealand Inc.
Head Office: Seventh Floor, Central House,
26 Brandon Street, Wellington.
Postal address: P. O. Box 631, Wellington.

Editor: David G. Collingwood.

Recommended price \$4.00

Registered at P.O. Headquarters, Wellington as a magazine.

Design and typesetting by Bryce Francis Ltd and printed in
association with Commercial Print Ltd.



Saving our heritage!

I write my first editorial as President of the Society in the midst of a general election campaign. By the time you read this there will be a new administration and possibly a change of Government. For the incoming Government there are significant nature conservation priorities.

Firstly they should recognize that preservation of our natural environment is not a selfish or narrow objective. By preserving nature we are protecting the key features of our country that distinguish us from the rest of the world. Our kauri forests, coastlines, forests, tussock grasslands, lakes and rivers occur nowhere else in the world. They deserve protection in their own right and are also a major attraction for visitors to this country who will leave behind nearly \$600 million in foreign exchange this year.

Preservation of a representative network of natural areas throughout the country is one of the highest priorities for nature conservation today. The scientific methodology for the programme has been developed by the DSIR's Biological Resource Centre and needs an adequate funding base. The test of the programme's effectiveness, however, must be whether reserve recommendations are implemented in the face of rapid change of natural ecosystems throughout the country by the expansion of forestry and agriculture.

The present imbalance in our reserve system urgently needs correction. Lowland forest areas are inadequately protected — Punakaiki, Waitutu, Karamaea forests, South Westland's kahikatea and Whirinaki are all areas of importance. Wetland protection is essential. Our wetlands of national and international importance

need permanent protection and the Government should adopt a wetlands policy as soon as possible.

Government funding which is accelerating the clearance of native forest and the drainage of wetlands on private land through Rural Bank loans and Forestry Encouragement Grants must be subject to environmental controls.

Non forested ecosystems including shrublands, tussock grasslands and natural dunelands are very poorly represented in our present reserves. The major responsibility to secure protection for all these areas rests with the Government. Crown lands encompass many of the threatened and poorly represented natural areas left in New Zealand. This issue of "Forest and Bird" focuses on some of the Crown owned areas that deserve protection. Protection of these areas could occur at little cost to the taxpayer yet with major benefits for nature conservation, recreation and tourism.

Nature conservation and protection on private land is also important and involves careful negotiation and consultation. The ultimate decision to reserve must always rest with the private land-owner. Crown purchase of all privately owned natural areas is unrealistic except for a few of the most important sites. However, incentives should be offered to make it attractive to private landowners to retain natural areas. Our Society will continue to encourage the protection of natural areas on private land through covenants such as the Queen Elizabeth II Trust open space, and through the provisions of the Reserves Act and by local authority planning procedures.

Dr A. S. Edmonds, President

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