

Waitere



DSIR ecologist John McLennan with a North Island brown kiwi captured at Waitere: "The kiwi has always appealed to me enormously — as a creature, not just scientifically".

Photo: Graeme Harrison

Native shrubland in an exotic sea

By Allan Bell, DSIR journalist

Waitere is 1650 hectares of scrubland — still regenerating after decades of fires — which shelters probably the largest population of kiwis in an isolated remnant in the Hawke's Bay area. It lies 20 kms inland towards the Mohaka River from Tutira on the Napier-Gisborne highway. The Waitere block is Crown land, and last year it was scheduled to be cleared for farmland. It is also the site which the Agricultural Ecology section of DSIR's Ecology Division chose for a study on the effect of land clearance on kiwis. The research has been carried out from the section's base in Havelock North by Dr John McLennan and two short-term workers, Murray Potter and Mark Robinson.

The original research plan was radically modified by the discovery of the relatively dense population of North Island brown kiwi (*Apteryx australis*) at Waitere. Residents thought that no kiwis lived there, but in the first two nights fieldworkers located five birds.

When the Napier branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society heard of the kiwis' presence in January 1984, they called for the block to be reserved. The Lands and Survey Department halted clearance, and in August released a management plan, which is open for public submissions until November 16.

The management plan designates a third of the block to be cleared, with any resident kiwis being relocated. The

remaining 1000 hectares will be under a three-year moratorium while Lands and Survey evaluate plant and bird life more closely. This moratorium zone contains at least 24 known kiwis, including three chicks. The Department is to study the feasibility of shifting these kiwis also, and maintains the right to cut a road across the middle of the block.

Scrubland studies

The Waitere study is one part of a large-scale project, under the leadership of Dr Mike Rudge, researching scrubland from the ranges to the coast. Thirty percent of New Zealand's land area is covered in scrub. A lot of wild habitat such as gullies, shelterbelts and riverbeds remains scattered across the highly