

International Recognition for Dr Lance McCaskill



Society distinguished life member Dr Lance McCaskill has been awarded the Peter Scott Award for Conservation Merit by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

The award was made at IUCN's 16th General Assembly in Madrid, Spain last November. It recognises McCaskill's lifelong commitment to nature conservation in New Zealand, including his successful campaign to rescue the Castle Hill buttercup from near extinction.

Less publicised, but equally significant, have been McCaskill's battles with bureaucracy to seek protection for natural areas. He was a key figure in initiating retirement schemes for the high altitude, eroded mountain lands of the South Island high country.

In 1967, McCaskill successfully campaigned against the realignment of the scenic highway over the summit of Arthur's Pass. This would have resulted in the destruction of extensive alpine tarns. His 12-page account of this campaign "The Battle for the Tarns" is a good case study for all active conservationists.

Copies of the booklet are available from the Secretary, RF&BPS, Box 631, Wellington for \$1.50.

In his 80's, Dr McCaskill is still going strong and attended the recent Christchurch Joint Forestry Campaign seminar on beech.

Masons Bay, Stewart Island returns to full Crown control

The leasehold rights to the sand dunes, wetlands, tussock grasslands and forest of the Island Hills pastoral lease at Masons Bay have just been purchased by the Government. Minister of Lands, Koro Wetere, announced the purchase in November 1984. It clears the way for this spectacular natural area being given the full reserve status it deserves.

Island Hills pastoral lease lies on the wild west coast of Stewart Island and includes some of the largest natural sand

dunes remaining in New Zealand. The rare plant *Gunnera hamiltonii* occurs in only one patch on the pingao-covered dunes. New Zealand dotterel, fairy prion, red crowned parakeet and large numbers of Stewart Island kiwis are some of the special birds found here. Behind the dunes, there is an extensive area of red tussock and native shrublands with important wetlands and native forest.

In early 1984, Forest and Bird appealed a Land Settlement Board decision to approve freeholding of nearly half the property. The lessee, Mr Te Aika, is a keen naturalist but we were concerned that freeholding would mean there could be no controls on inappropriate development by any subsequent owners. The Society appeal triggered a review of the future of Island Hills, resulting in the Crown purchase.

Farming is uneconomic at Masons Bay. A management study is to be carried out over the next 12 months to determine the future of the area. We believe the whole of Island Hills should be given reserve status and managed for its natural, scenic and recreational values.

Third South Pacific National Parks and Reserves Conference Apia, June-July 1985

This will be hosted by the Government of Western Samoa over the period 15 June-6 July 1985. One central theme of the conference will be traditional conservation knowledge and practice and its implication for conservation policy, park management and sustainable resource development. The National Parks concept of developed countries is not always appropriate in the South Pacific where the issues of custom and tribal ownership vitally affect management of land and water. Knowledge of customary practices is disappearing and needs to be revitalised. Protected area management must consider not just modern scientific knowledge about nature conservation but also traditional ways of ensuring that adequate numbers of plants and animals survive.

Delegations will be attending the conference from the 22 countries served by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme.

Reprieve for Spirits Bay shrublands but why not cut the clearance subsidies?

The 2,250 hectares of shrublands, regenerating forest and wetlands zoned for clearance in the Te Paki management plan are temporarily safe. This decision has just been announced by Lands and Survey, Auckland who are responsible for the Te Paki Farm Park in the far north. Over 350 people and organisations submitted comment on the plan and there was overwhelming criticism of the clearance proposal.

In response to public submissions, Lands and Survey have commissioned Auckland University botanists to carry out further studies in the Spirits Bay catchment. Results from these studies are not expected until mid-1985. In their earlier submissions both Botany Division DSIR and Wildlife Service identified a range of rare plants, animals and special plant associations in the catchment and sought preservation of the entire area.

Farm development of Te Paki's unique shrublands is only economic because of the very low interest rates (3.5-4.3% pa) Lands and Survey pays on its land development loans. In Forest and Bird's submission on the Te Paki plan we calculated that had Lands and Survey paid market interest rates (6-14%) on their Te Paki development loans over the last 10 years, Te Paki station would have made a loss of nearly \$1 million over that period rather than its declared "profit" of \$194,000.

The November 1984 Budget will substantially lift interest rates for the private farming sector but not for Government agencies involved in natural land clearance. This anomaly should be removed. Thus Lands and Survey clearance activity proposed or underway at Te Paki, Hawkes Bay's Waitere Kiwi block, the forested 3,000 hectare Mangaone block next to Urewera National Park and the 2,000 ha of beech forest at Perserverance, North Westland, could be assessed in terms of its real economic and ecological costs and benefits.

Conservation staff changes

In January Terry Fitzgibbon of Whangarei moved to our head office to commence duties as a Conservation Officer. Terry has a Masters degree in planning and work experience in resource planning and biological surveys. For the last two years he has lived in Whangarei and worked for the Northland United Council and has organised the Northland Information Centre for the Environment. From April, Terry will take over head office conservation work from Gerry McSweeney who is to visit Australia for three months on an Anzac Fellowship, to study conservation organisation, national parks and reserves.

Bruce Mason of Dunedin is working jointly for our Society, FMC and NZ Acclimatisation Societies this year on our South Island Pastoral Lease Campaign. His primary task is to identify ways to protect natural areas and recreational opportunities on the 2.7 million hectares of Crown-owned pastoral lease land. He will also coordinate the six pastoral lease working groups we have established from Blenheim through to Southland.

From March, Kevin Smith (Box 57, Hari Hari, South Westland phone 33-090) will start working as the Society's West Coast Regional Field Officer.