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Cover caption: Rising sheer from the still waters of Doubtful South, the towering slopes of Commander Peak (right) dwarf a tourist boat. Rolla Island lies in the centre, with Mt Danae in the background. Supertankers that Triune Resources Ltd plan to use in this fiord could be hundreds of times the size of this boat, and would mean the creation of a major port in the heart of Fiordland, one of the world's largest national parks. Photo: Les Hutchins, Fiordland Travel Ltd.

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## Managing Our Natural Areas

Early last December I was a privileged guest of the Wildlife Service on South East Island, a nature reserve off Pitt Island in the Chathams. Used by sealers and whalers from about 1815, the island was later developed for farming, and bush was cleared from large areas.

South East is now the most important island for wildlife in the Chatham group. Seven different species of petrel breed here. It is the last refuge for the New Zealand shore plover, Chatham Island petrel, and most Chatham Island oystercatchers. The full range of Chatham Island bush birds lives on the island: the tui, parakeet, fantail, tit, warbler, snipe. And now black robins have been introduced along with Chatham pigeons.

Bought by the Crown in 1965, the last sheep were removed in 1961. The island has no rats, mice, cats, mustelids or opossums.

Other islands in the Chathams make their contributions to the unique natural history of the group. Pitt Island now has two large, fenced nature reserves in which the best of the original forest is conserved with its great variety of endemic plants.

On Chatham Island the southern tablelands peat areas support communities of the giant jointed rush, *Sporodanthus*, as well as an endangered speargrass and two spectacular tree daisies. The endangered Chatham Island taiko may well breed here too. Mangere Island, also a Crown-owned nature reserve, supports a small black robin population, as well as Forbes parakeet, although the area of forest remaining is woefully small to ensure their long-term survival.

Like the main islands of New Zealand, the Chathams reveal a long history of farming development, exploitation of natural resources and indifference — sometimes unconscious — to wildlife and plants. Today they are threatened by large-scale peat mining. The challenge on the Chathams, just as on the mainland, is to ensure that remaining natural areas and native wildlife have a secure future.

Too often our response to that challenge is ineffective, and reflects the artificial divisions within government. Dedicated people within the Wildlife Service, Lands and Survey, the Forest Service and parts of DSIR have done excellent work for conservation. But often that good work founders because of conflicts between departments responsible for natural areas and those committed to development.

One only has to look at the latest conflicts over Te Pahi, the Waitere kiwi block, South Island high country wetlands and the Buller native forests.

Our endangered plants and birds, including those on the Chathams, are not exempt from such conflicts. Their future is threatened by our inability to develop species survival plans.

We need a strong advocate for the natural environment which will bring together skills and resources. Such advocacy belongs in a Ministry for the Environment, of the sort that our Society has been calling for. But to take on this vital role, it must have more than the planning division offered in the Government's recent white paper.

It is imperative that we have a ministry with a strong nature conservation division, integrating the management of wildlife, natural waters, native forests, wetlands and other habitats. This was the policy of the Government going into last year's election. It must be the outcome of their present deliberations.

Dr A. S. Edmonds, President

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