

His appointment recognises the major importance of Westland with its extensive remaining lowland native forests and wetlands. Kevin is a botanist with broad experience in ecological survey work. During his 10 years' residence in Westland he has been a leader in nature conservation in the region. His position will be largely funded from the resources of our Canterbury and West Coast branches who have recognised the need for a full time worker in the region. These branches would welcome any offers of financial assistance to support Kevin's employment.

For whom the axe falls

For students of environmental history, some priceless gems emerged during the course of the Parliamentary snap debate on Tongariro State Forest (see article page 11). Conservation strategists, in particular, will find the pages of *Hansard* well worth a read. We present below a sample of the livelier bons mots.

Winston Peters (National-Tauranga): "Dr McSweeney, who is not any old human being, but is the conservation officer for the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, said the decision violates the 1977 Government Indigenous Forest Policy. Are members to believe Dr McSweeney or the Government, terribly embarrassed as it is in this matter?"

Rob Storey (National-Waikato): "All I can say is that it is not 'virgin indigenous,' it is verging on the ridiculous."

Dr Michael Cullen (Government Chief Whip): "Some important lessons emerge from the debate. The first... is that there is a need for the Forest Service to be clearer about its lines of consultation and communication before decisions are finalised or announced."

Derek Angus (National-Wallace): "The Government stands condemned, and future generations of New Zealanders will remember. Where will the axe fall next? It is a bad day for New Zealand."

Subsidised drainage poses major threat to West Coast wetlands

Our Government's election policy made clear its commitment to protect our dwindling wetlands. Its natural waters policy states: "*Labour recognises that wetlands are a scarce resource of nationwide importance. Accordingly wetlands already identified as of national importance will be protected with permanent reserve status. Wetland drainage will only be allowed where a catchment-wide evaluation shows it can occur without unacceptably adverse effects on scenic, habitat or hydrological values.*"

Government-subsidised drainage schemes pose the greatest threat to our few remaining wetlands. Catchment boards, which initiate and administer these schemes, are largely staffed by engineers who have made their careers in draining wetlands and manipulating rivers. The

boards themselves are often dominated by conservative farmers who narrowly view wetlands as potentially productive farmland. However a range of studies now show that the most economic way to increase agricultural production is usually through intensification and diversification of existing farmland. Thereby wetlands can be left for flood control, to store water, as wildlife habitat and as scenic and recreational areas.

The Westland Catchment Board in particular seems hell-bent on destroying the natural wetlands which are a special feature of its region. Approved wetland drainage schemes in Westland qualify for a special 50 percent direct Government subsidy. Much of the balance of the drainage cost in the past has been met through low-interest Government loans.

Major swamp drainage schemes underway in Westland include the huge Kongahu swamp near Karamea and drainage of the extensive Rotokino flax swamp near Whataroa. The Board has announced drainage schemes for the Birchfield swamp near Westport; Lake Haupiri, a wildlife refuge in Central Westland; the Ohinetamatea swamp next to Westland National Park and part of the magnificent Kini flax swamp at Bruce Bay in South Westland.

Their rush to get these schemes approved seems designed to beat proposed changes to the Water and Soil Act to protect wetlands and threats to drainage subsidies posed by the Government's market orientated realism in rural land use.

The wetlands threatened with drainage have been ranked of national importance by the Wildlife Service. Labour has therefore pledged to protect them.

The flax swamps of Westland are the breeding ground for much of New Zealand's finest whitebait — but for how much longer?

Summer programmes in our parks and reserves — an appreciation

Throughout National and Forest Parks and Reserves this summer, hundreds of Government department staff have run summer nature programmes for the public. Many Society members have participated in these nature walks and talks. The dedication and enthusiasm of the staff who put so much into helping us discover our nature heritage is greatly appreciated by all members of our Society and the public.

Dr Gerry McSweeney
National Conservation Officer

Old Blue : mother of the black robins

Old Blue is probably dead, but the Chatham Island black robin has been pulled back from certain extinction by the breeding efforts of this remarkable bird. No sign of her could be found last spring in the forests of South East Island in the Chathams. She was last seen in December 1983 at Whalers Bay near the Coast, where she liked to bask in the sun within sound of the rare shore plover.

First banded as an adult on Little Mangere Island in March 1972, she was probably born in December 1970. Old Blue was shifted to Mangere Island in 1976 along with four of the other surviving six black robins, five of which were males. Chatham Island black robins had become the world's most endangered bird.

Mangere Island had been bought by the Crown in the 1960's with financial help from our Society; that help continued as the forest on the island was replanted to provide habitat for robins.

With numbers so low and breeding success threatened, the Wildlife Service

Black robin fed by tit foster parent.

Photo: NZ Wildlife Service



began in 1980 the programme of cross-fostering black robin eggs in the nests of Chatham Island warblers.

Don Merton, Wildlife Office, is truly the godfather to these birds; his skill, care, patience, daring and love throughout the transfers and cross-fosterings brought success where extinction seemed a certainty. Watching his careful transfers of eggs and chicks between the nests of black robins and Chatham Island tits last December brought home to me how much we owe to the dedicated people working for the Wildlife Service.

Although Old Blue may be dead, she lives on in her offspring. She was the mother of six surviving offspring and grandmother to eleven; in fact all surviving black robins are her progeny except for her husband, Old Yellow, and Old Green. Old Blue produced the core of birds which took part in the cross-fostering programme, resulting in the present rash of youngsters. In December 1984 there were 19 chicks and 19 adults.

The whole programme breaks new ground by world standards, is a direct result of the skill and resourcefulness of Wildlife Officers, and might not have happened without Old Blue and her stickability.

You don't have to be a Wildlife Officer to help our endangered species. See page 5 of this issue for what you can do.

Alan Edmonds, President