



Birds such as the morepork (above) are no longer seen by some Catlins residents because of bush clearance. South Island robins are still present, (below) but for how much longer?

Photos: C. R. Veitch and Wildlife Service.



HENRY JONES is a retired farmer who lives in Balclutha and farmed all his life in the Catlins apart from three years overseas service. His son Roger now owns the Glenomaru property and in 1980 he and his father covenanted and fenced 60 acres of bush on the property.

"Many years ago, the valley looked very attractive with most of the hilltops and gullies covered in native bush.

"Less than half of the bush that existed in the areas when I commenced farming still remains.

"With the reduction in bush areas, run-off is now much faster causing flash-flooding and erosion. The area is also much drier. A lot of the hill-

streams have dried up and I had to put in water supplies for stock before my retirement. I have noticed also that much of the bird-life I can remember is no longer there. For instance, I have not seen such birds as kaka and morepork for years.

"I accept that bush clearing was necessary to establish farms but I consider that a lot of the areas cleared more recently have less productive land which should have been left in its natural state.

"I realise that many farmers intend keeping their bush. I am concerned that when these farms change hands, the new owners may have a different approach to the natural bush. They may well fail to recognise the fact that it gives natural shelter, natural water retention and therefore a continuous water supply over dry periods and a variety of landscape with the bush providing contrast to pasture.

"I believe that controls are important to protect the bush that is left and consider that the County should be giving every encouragement to farmers to retain the bush areas on their farms."

PETER GARDINER farms at Romahapa in the Clutha County. He is on the committee of South Otago Forest and Bird and until last year was the branch's chairman.

"The South Otago Branch of RF&BPS has consistently sought greater recognition and protection of the values of the bush areas that remain in Clutha County. We are very proud that our County has the largest area of bush remaining on the entire eastern coast of the South Island.

"We are lucky to still have examples of a whole range of native forest types from the coastal sand dune forests to river valley and mountain forests. Our forest areas are still extensive enough to host uncommon birds such as yellow crowned parakeet, yellowhead and robin. They are a tremendous asset for recreation and tourism and also play an important role in protecting the soil and yielding a steady flow of clean water.

"Our branch has done its best to develop an appreciation of the natural values of the Clutha County amongst residents by publicising these areas, by running field trips through the bush areas and by giving support, both practical and moral, to Government agencies seeking to protect bush areas under their control. We have also attempted to identify and discourage those activities which are destroying bush in our County. It has been very sad to see how rapidly bush areas continue to disappear in this area.

"These bush areas contribute to the natural and scenic importance of our County. We believe that before they are cleared it is appropriate for the County to have the chance to assess whether such clearance is justified by consulting with the owner and with ratepayers.

"Is bush clearance a wise use of land? Clearly it will depend on personal circumstances. As a farmer, however, it has disappointed me in our County to see areas cleared which I believe should never have been cleared in the interest of wise land use.

"These include scenic areas, south-facing cold slopes and often areas on steep soils. Many of these areas have simply reverted to scrub or low producing grasses.

"The Ministry of Agriculture's message to farmers these days is loud and clear. It is that it makes better economic sense for us to concentrate our development programmes on increasing production off existing cleared land rather than on breaking in new land. Production increases can be achieved by better stock management, by rotational grazing, by better fertiliser use and by the development of improved pastures.

"I have seen tourism grown in the Catlins and provided it is sensitively controlled I believe it will make a growing contribution to the economy and services of our region.

"It is vital however that we retain the coastal bush and scenery which attracts the tourists here in the first place. This is why we need the bush clearance controls in our District Scheme."

PAUL DAVIS, who is the Tourist and Publicity Department's Liaison Officer for Otago and Southland, has worked in tourism for 13 years in New Zealand and New York.

"The tourist appeal of the Catlins area is very much derived from the harmony of the native bush and coastal seascape. Any reduction in the areas of native bush that remain, especially those good examples of bush which can be seen from the road, decreases that appeal. Any such decrease inevitably has an adverse effect on the area's tourist potential.

"Tourism is important to New Zealand both for the overseas funds it brings in and in the widening of New Zealanders' horizons. The Catlins area provides an important actual and potential tourist attraction and the native bush stands are a critical part of the area's appeal. In addition, the preservation of the native bush enables the preservation of part of the diversity that makes our country a tourist attraction."