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### Cover caption:

The long orange rays of a winter sunset play on the waters of Pauatahanui Inlet, just north of Wellington. The Society's efforts to transform this area into a reserve are outlined on page 2. Photo: T. Fitzgibbon.

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## Strangers in our midst

The history of animal introduction into New Zealand has not been a happy one — especially that brief span since the arrival of the first European settlers. Pigs, goats and sheep came first (deliberate introductions), along with less welcome rats. In 1837 the first possums arrived; the procession increased with domestic rabbits in 1838; red deer and hares in 1851; fallow deer and the first wild rabbits in 1864; hedgehogs in 1870; and sambar deer in 1875-76. Still to come were wapiti, chamois and tahr.

The Society has been concerned since its inception with the problems these unwanted animals have caused. As late as 1979 it published a booklet by a former president of the Society, entitled *Deer and Resulting Devastation in New Zealand*, which argued for complete eradication of certain species "when humane methods become practical." That time has not yet arrived; meanwhile control will have to suffice.

But how effective is that present control? The Forest Service, which has responsibility for wild animal control, argues in the first of three articles on the subject (Page 5) that deer and possums should now be accepted as a permanent feature of our wildlife. Critics will point out that control measures could be sterner, and that the proper place for recreation hunting areas is not adjacent to National Parks (Mount Aspiring, for example). While it may be difficult, if not impossible, to exterminate the more common deer and possum, could the same be said of tahr? The Government is soon to release a document on the future of tahr, but meanwhile a commercial hunting ban remains, applying in particular to Mount Cook and Westland and National Parks.

Dr Carolyn King, an expert on stoats and weasels, believes there is no point in trying to control these mustelid predators, except to safeguard the North Island kokako, the takahe, the black stilt and the kakapo on Stewart Island. Higher priorities, in her view, are saving habitats, ecological research and general conservation education. Her provocative article on stoats is on page 7. Finally, scientists Colin Ogle and Peter Wilson have been investigating the widespread decline of native mistletoes; their findings point to the possum as the culprit.

Society conservation officers Terry Fitzgibbon and Kevin Smith take a critical look in separate articles at the performance of Lands and Survey and the Forest Service over the protection of some key native areas.

The response to our Quest competitions — announced in the May issue — has been far from overwhelming, so we have extended the deadline. Parents and teachers, encourage children to enter, and remember the prizes are not insubstantial — the short story carries a first prize of \$90.

This issue the Society is introducing a number of exciting products which should appeal to members — greeting cards, a poster, sweatshirts and t-shirts. Do support what is becoming an increasingly-used service. The mail order catalogue is a part of the magazine this time and is on pages 39 and 40.

**Gerard Hutching**, Editor

Contributors to *Forest & Bird* may express their opinions on contentious issues. Those opinions are not necessarily the prevailing opinion of the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society.

