

Tropical Rainforest Destruction — A Global Problem

The imminent demise of tropical rainforests is not just a problem that faces the countries where this devastation is occurring, but one that affects us all. Though the forests that remain cover only 2 per cent of the globe, they are the habitat of half of all surviving species of living things. Forty percent of our medicines originate in these forests. Their future value to science, plant breeding and animal husbandry is incalculable, not to mention their present value to both the people and wildlife that find a home in such forests. These mind-shattering statistics show the problem is an urgent one: more than 11 million hectares a year, or almost 30 hectares a minute of rainforest is disappearing!

Readers of *Forest and Bird* this issue will become aware of a multiplicity of conservation problems facing the Pacific Islands — the closest area of tropical rainforest to New Zealand. Increasingly the islands are becoming the focus of logging activities; appropriately it should therefore become the focus of a conservation effort from New Zealand. This magazine heralds the beginning of a campaign by the Society together with Pacific Island, Australian and other New Zealand conservation groups to assist island conservation. A special appeal is to follow in the middle of the year; please donate to this generously.

Successive governments have spoken of our "Pacific identity" and of cementing relationships with the small nations of our region. In the political and the practical arena, this has led us to consider more carefully the needs and aspirations of our Pacific neighbours. As a result, our development aid has become increasingly focussed on Polynesia and Melanesia. In accepting the tenets of the New Zealand Conservation Strategy, New Zealand officials have recognised the need to balance development with conservation within this country, but have we embraced that philosophy in terms of our assistance outside? Certainly, our government has participated in some important conservation projects, notably the establishment of O Le Pupu Pu'e National Park in Western Samoa.

It could be argued, though, that development aid projects do not receive the amount of environmental scrutiny which similar works would be subject to here. While we cannot dictate to other nations the sorts of projects they should undertake, we can at least give a sympathetic hearing to requests for assistance in conservation. In such a way, the lessons New Zealand has learnt can be passed on.

We need to be bold in approaching these problems, but this boldness must be tempered with a clear understanding of the community needs and structures of the nations concerned. Environmental or scientific arrogance has no place in any assistance which we may be able to give.

Alan Edmonds, President



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Journal of the Royal Forest & Bird
Protection Society of
New Zealand Inc.
ISSN 0015-7384

Forest & Bird is published quarterly
by the Royal Forest & Bird
Protection Society of
New Zealand Inc.

Head Office: Seventh Floor, Central
House,
26 Brandon Street, Wellington.

Postal address: P.O. Box 631,
Wellington

Editor: Gerard Hutching.

Registered at P.O. Headquarters,
Wellington as a magazine.

Design & Production: Creative Services
Typesetting: Computype. Photo Process
Spectrascan. Printing: Lithographic
Services.