



Restoring **MANA**

Legend has it that Maori navigator Kupe gave Wellington's offshore island its name Mana to commemorate his momentous achievement in journeying from Hawaiki to Aotearoa. Since then the prestige of the title has been eroded by centuries of misuse; today only a smattering of remnant vegetation and wildlife remains. Society Conservation Officer Terry Fitzgibbon outlines the way in which *mana* can be restored to Mana, by way of a huge replanting programme.



With a bellow and a snort the last Mana Island bull recently stomped down the jetty ramp onto the departing barge. The March muster this year marked the final chapter in the grazing saga of the 216-hectare island; sadly the bull-crammed barge left behind a largely denuded landscape thanks to over 150 years of intensive grazing and cultivation.

Mana's history is marked by exploitive events. Local tribes living on the island in the 1820s were swept off by the Waikato's Ngati Toa and Taranaki's Ngati Awa, led respectively by their chiefs Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihaeata. Much of the original vegetation was destroyed prior to European settlement in 1832, but the succeeding decades saw more disappear to make way for sheep and cattle.

The chequered history of control of the island continued to recent times. In 1973 the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries sank thousands of dollars into turning it into an exotic sheep quarantine and breeding research station. A scrapie outbreak in 1978 required all the island's stock to be slaughtered and put paid to the station.

Since then the Lands and Survey Department farming operation has lost a further \$300,000 because of high transport costs. However now in a widely praised move, the Department has just recommended in a draft management plan, a rapid phasing out of farming and the refreshing idea of recreating the island as a haven for rare and endangered species. This will be done by re-clothing the island with plants representative of the region, and opening it up to the public so all Mana's history — natural and cultural — can be enjoyed.

The project is about to get underway and deserves full Society support — not finance but a lot of spadework and public enthusiasm.

The worldwide native re-afforestation trend has reached New Zealand's shores in recent years, with Tiritiri Matangi near Auckland providing a successful example of what can be achieved on Mana. Since 1983 this Hauraki Gulf 'open sanctuary' has been carpeted with 90,000 trees and shrubs, all of which have been raised from locally gathered seed. In three months alone, some 600 people planted 19,000 trees, pricked out 9000 pohutukawa seedlings and built 130 roosting boxes for the island's newest inhabitants, saddlebacks.

Mana Island lies 2.5 km off the west coast just north of Wellington. Long stripped of virtually all its native vegetation, a replanting programme is being proposed which is likely to be followed by introductions of some of our endangered wildlife.

Inset: Mana's bulls, havoc on the hoof for the island's remnant forest. Photo: T. Fitzgibbon

Still surviving under the skirts of Mana's tauwhinu bush, the giant weta *Deinacrida rugosa* is one of the heaviest insects in the world. Photo: T. Fitzgibbon