



### Good news for the rare takahe

The flightless takahe, thought to have been extinct until their re-discovery in Fiordland's Murchison Mountains 38 years ago, have increased in numbers for the second year in succession. In December 1985, 181 takahe were counted at the end of the breeding season compared to 153 the year before and a mere 120 birds for the three years prior to that.

Intensive control of deer which compete with the takahe for their favoured tussock food has clearly improved takahe breeding. Captive-bred takahe are also being reared at the Burwood Bush red tussock reserve near Te Anau.

In October, the Wildlife Service will now establish the second major wild population of takahe in Fiordland's Stuart mountains. This should allow for continued expansion of takahe range and numbers. It will also provide insurance against any catastrophe in the Murchison Mountain's takahe population.

The Southland National Parks and Reserves Board deserves praise for approving this move in the face of major regional opposition from deerstalkers.

### Letters to MPs exempt postage

Postal charges are not all bad news. . . . It is no longer necessary to put a stamp on a letter to an MP, or to Ministers of the Crown, the Governor General, High Court judges or on petitions to Parliament weighing up to 1kg. The decision to extend free Ministerial postage to cover all MPs was made by the Postmaster-General 18 months ago but little publicised since.

### A marine reserve for the Kermadec Islands?

The volcanic Kermadec Islands, halfway between New Zealand and Tonga, are uninhabited apart from a weather station on Raoul, the largest island. The land of the islands is a reserve. Lands and Survey Department have just invited public comment to help it prepare a management plan to protect the Kermadecs' special plants and animals.

However perhaps the most outstanding natural features of the Kermadecs are to be found in their surrounding seas. These host the world's only unfished population of huge spotted black grouper and bass which are virtually tame. There is also a great mixture of tropical and sub-tropical fish.

The Government's Fisheries Research Division recently proposed the Kermadec Islands as a marine reserve. Their proposal will shortly be circulated for public comment and deserves wide support. The August issue of our Journal looks at the conservation of New Zealand's marine ecosystems and focusses in particular on the Kermadecs and Fiordland.

### Hopes high to save Karamaea's Oparara forests

Great limestone arches; the Honeycomb limestone caves hosting bones of moas and extinct birds; giant land snails; the nation's most extensive remaining alluvial beech-podocarp (Type PB1) forests and a fascinating mosaic of virgin forest on many different rock types — the Oparara valley near Karamaea lies within the North West Nelson Forest. Since 1976 it has been the focus of national conservation campaigns to stop logging and widespread bush burnoffs to plant pines.

Since then, scientific studies have revealed an amazing array of rare and special plants and animals in the valley. However the Oparara isn't just important for science. Its limestone arches and caves are now Karamaea's premier tourist attraction and walking tracks in the valley are increasingly popular both with visitors and the local school. Forest Service Ranger, Norm Stopforth, recently proposed linking existing tracks to provide a superb 2-3 day walk through the Oparara from the Karamaea end of the Heaphy Track.

The future of the Oparara will be decided on 12-15 May when the Government's scientific committee on reserves visits the valley to consider preservation pleas from DSIR, the Wildlife Service and our joint Forestry Campaign.

### Whakatane farmers back bush protection campaign

Whakatane farmers have backed the young Maori leaders who recently seized control of Taiaraha mountain near Ruatoki to stop its Maori-owned forests being cleared for pines by Tasman Forestry Ltd.

35 dairy, drystock and maize farmers along the banks and the valley of the Whakatane river have petitioned Parliament to offer development alternatives to the Tuhoe-Waikaremoana Trust Board and Tasman Forestry. They fear that continued bush clearance will increase water runoff leading to disastrous floods.

### Water exports evaporate?

Proposals to export water from Deep Cove appear to have sunk, with the news

that likely Triune Resources buyer, the Goodman Group Ltd, has decided not to enter the water export business. The move by Goodmans to buy out Triune appears to have been designed to allay New Zealanders' fears that an American company would own a New Zealand asset. Ever since Triune mooted the idea of exporting water from the Deep Cove tail race, there has been both tourism and environmental opposition.

Our Society criticised both the Deep Cove concept and its technical proposals. Giant supertankers' daily visits to the fiord would detract from the integrity and wilderness quality of our largest park. It would be disastrous for tourism and outdoor education activities in the fiord. Major pollution and shipwreck risks were also identified in Triune's scheme.

Meanwhile a proposal for a black coral underwater observatory in Milford Sound has been welcomed by our Society's Southland branch. Visitors could then discover the world's most extensive and accessible black coral. This would increase public support for extension of Fiordland National Park to include the fiords and ultimately protection in the South West New Zealand World Heritage area.

### Kini swamp next doomed West Coast wetland

We were sceptical about the Government's January announcement that West Coast Wetlands Drainage Subsidies would no longer be available for draining fertile flax swamps but only for improving existing farmland. Government recently extended the subsidies for five years despite strong conservation opposition. (See *Forest and Bird* February 1985) Our concern was warranted. On 25 February, the Westland Catchment Board, despite the new policy, approved drainage of the flax-dominant Kini swamp near Bruce Bay in South Westland. Our Society and the Wildlife Service are appealing to the Planning Tribunal against the decision. The credibility of the Government's new National Wetland policy and of Works Minister Fraser Colman and his officials is in tatters unless they too take action.

Gerry McSweeney,  
Conservation Director



A postcard of a certain chimney belching black smoke bearing the above postmark was recently received from Forest and Bird's Taranaki branch.