

New accommodation (right) is a vast improvement on the traditional, more cramped A-frame. Photo: R Anderson

sunset and the moon is their sun,"), and because they boom only every two years, it is vital that these times be observed.

An expedition of about a dozen Wildlife Officers and volunteers assembled at Te Anau in mid-January 1986, and with the aid of helicopters were removed from the comfort of motel beds to perches thousands of feet high on mountain fastnesses within minutes. Some were more fortunate than others; their homes for the next few weeks would be huts supplied by BP as part of the company's \$23,000 contribution to the kakapo project. The remainder would have to settle for tents, come rain or snow.

The first morning of my stay in the Transit Valley, we decide to tackle "The Kastle", so named for its impregnable appearance. From our camp, the safest way up to it is via a fixed rope suspended down a steep gut. Access to this natural promontory is extremely hazardous for humans, but kakapo have clambered up such steep ridges for eons towards their rendezvous with their mates. Perhaps only here have predators failed to penetrate.

Signs are apparent of kakapo feeding but disappointingly they are old, possibly several months or even longer. Tales of kakapo feeding and "housekeeping" habits are



legend.

"They are quite fussy about their booming areas which they like to keep clean and tidy. If twigs are placed at right angles on their tracks they take pains to place them aside — it's a good way to work out if they have been in the vicinity recently," explains Anderson.

Strictly vegetarian, their favoured foods are spaniard, celmisia, dracophyllum and tussock, of which they eat large amounts to gain a weight of up to 3.4 kg.

"In July they are in splendid condition, those found having as much as two inches of fat on them. They used frequently to plunder the vegetable garden I had established near my lonely camp, and one morning I actually came across one asleep

under a cabbage. He had so gorged himself during the night that he could go no further." (Reischek, *Yesterdays in Maoriland*.)

The following three days are spent in exhaustive and exhausting searches for kakapo sign. Distances are measured in hours rather than mileage, for leatherwood makes for uncompromising travel. By the end of the week we have seen a little sign but a fraction of the valley, and one understands why helicopters have become such an important part of Wildlife work.

At night the news of the day is broadcast to Burwood Station at Te Anau, which receives from all the kakapo searchers in Fiordland as well as those on Stewart Island, staff working on takahe in the Murchison Mountains and on black stilt in the

## Richard Henry, early conservationist

*The person most often associated with kakapo is that remarkable early conservationist, Richard Henry, whose biography Richard Henry of Resolution Island is to be published in the near future (authors Susanne and John Hill, Publisher John McIndoe). With the kind permission of the publishers and author, Forest and Bird here reprints an edited version of the book's Epilogue, written by Don Merton of the Wildlife Service.*

There can be no doubt that Richard Henry was a remarkable and talented field naturalist, although perhaps only recently has the real significance of his work become apparent.

New Zealand's present success and international leadership in the management of threatened species might not have been achieved without Henry's foresight and commitment in conceiving and carrying out his innovative work. It was a pioneering effort and established a solid foundation for what has later become a most successful means employed by the New Zealand Wildlife Service and others of rehabilitating critically endangered species. The technique, which has been developed and refined over the years, has been the mainstay of our endangered species management, especially for the higher endemics many of which are incapable of co-existence with predatory mammals. Because effective long-term control of predators is not feasible on the mainland of New Zealand, predator-free islands offer

such species their only hope of survival in the wild. Since Henry's time, at least sixty transfers of birds to islands have been made for conservation purposes, involving sixteen bird taxa. Over two-thirds of these transfers have been successful. The technique has also been employed in the conservation of indigenous reptiles and invertebrates. Without these measures, at least a further four New Zealand bird taxa would now be extinct.

### Hard work

Henry's record of capturing and transferring birds in Dusky Sound is quite remarkable, given that kakapo are solitary creatures and that each bird ranges over thirty to fifty hectares. Even in Henry's day, when they were locally plentiful, kakapo were widely spaced on the ground, and the capture of each one involved much time and hard work. During the period April 1895 to December 1897, Henry transferred to Dusky's islands 474 kakapo, little grey kiwi, and 'roa', an average of

more than fourteen birds a month — a remarkable feat, especially when one considers the very difficult field conditions he had to endure. Not only did Henry pioneer the translocation of endangered species, but even now he has probably transferred more rare wild birds than has any other person. Henry cannot be blamed for the failure of kakapo to survive on Resolution Island. Had the sanctuary been a little farther from the mainland, out of swimming range of stoats, the outcome might well have been quite different.

With modern technology on our side, and at this eleventh hour in the bid to save the kakapo, some important advances have been made. For instance, in 1974 the first high-quality tape recordings were obtained, and playing these at night has been a useful aid in locating kakapo. Light-intensifying 'scopes, with which one can actually see in the dark, were used in 1975 to observe for the first time kakapo at night, booming and displaying at their track and bowl systems. The knowledge thus acquired has an uncanny similarity to conclusions reached by Henry almost a century before. He once wrote that if he could come back at night with the eyes of a cat to a hilltop where kakapo tracks and bowls were to be found, what a