



The takahe's method of feeding actually promotes tussock growth, whereas wapiti grazing stunts the plants. Photo: Peter Moore

set-up over the 1982/83 breeding season.

From four eggs, three chicks were successfully raised. These birds are now in captivity at the park. In the 1983/84 season six chicks were raised and during 1984/85 three chicks. These nine takahe were transferred to Maud Island in the Marlborough Sounds in April '84 and June '85 as a trial for the establishment of takahe in a pasture grass/island situation.

Permanent rearing facilities have now been built alongside State Highway 94 overlooking the Burwood Bush Reserve, and, in November 1985, 16 eggs were brought out in three transfers from the Murchison Mountains. Eggs brought out of the mountains are placed in incubators in an air-conditioned room. Once a day every egg is candled and accurately weighed. Hatching dates can then be calculated, based on the size of the egg and how much weight loss has occurred.

As the incubation period of 28-30 days nears its end, it is amusing to watch the eggs rocking about and to hear the baby takahe cheeping away inside the shell. At this stage, taped brooding calls of a parent bird are played through a speaker in the incubator. Just before the chick breaks completely out of the shell it is removed from the incubator and placed under a fibreglass model surrogate parent in a specially de-

signed brooder. This is to prevent imprinting to humans when the chicks are very young and to imitate as near as possible the rearing conditions in the wild.

Landscaped floor

The 'parent' is fully insulated, has a built-in speaker through which brooding calls of the parent are played, and a pet warmer pad is used to keep the chicks warm. Each brooder has a fibreglass landscaped floor, a small pond and a pot-planted tussock. A

one-way glass observation window allows the staff to monitor the birds without themselves being seen by the birds.

The brooders have been designed with two identical sides separated by a pulley-operated sliding door so that the chicks can be moved into the other side to allow regular cleaning of each brooder. The artificial lighting is programmed to coincide with daylight hours, and helps to keep the brooders at a constant temperature. Each brooder houses up to four chicks of a simi-



The rugged Murchison Mountains, last outpost of the takahe which was dramatically re-discovered in 1948. Photo: Peter Moore