

The Snares Island Nature Reserve, the least modified and most vulnerable of the remaining island groups that hold snipe populations.



and no snipe have been reported on Big South Cape since September 1964.

Chatham Island snipe were confined to the southern islands of the group by 1870, when collections were first made. They disappeared from Mangere Island during the 1890s following the establishment of rabbits and cats. Burning and grazing on South East Island reduced the only remaining population to very low numbers. There has been considerable regeneration on South East following the removal of stock in 1961, and snipe are now common there.

Cats and rabbits had died out on Mangere when it was purchased by the Crown, with the assistance of the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society, as a flora and fauna reserve in 1966. Mangere has only four hectares of forest, although extensive planting of akeake and flax should increase the regeneration rate of former pasture on the rest of the island. Twenty three snipe were reintroduced to Mangere from South East Island by the Wildlife Service in November 1980, soon after stock were removed. This introduction coincided with a heavy infestation of grass grubs, and snipe rapidly spread over the whole island, even

colonising neighbouring Little Mangere Island. Now the exotic grassland on Mangere is so rank and impenetrable that snipe are largely confined to the robin bush.

Even the remote southern populations of snipe have not escaped the effects of introduced predators. The Auckland Island snipe had disappeared from the main island of the group by 1840. Cats and pigs were established on the island then, and still occur, along with goats and mice. Auckland Island snipe are found in good numbers on unmodified Adams and Disappointment Islands, and on Ewing Island in Port Ross. On nearby Enderby Island, snipe are uncommon because cattle and rabbits have modified the habitat.

The only introduced mammal on the isolated, tussock-covered Antipodes Islands is the house mouse. Although mice have probably affected insect and plant species, snipe still abound on the main island and several of the offshore stacks. This ability to survive in the presence of mice is important for the long-term. If pigs and cats could be removed from Auckland Island, and pigs, cats and wekas from Pitt Island (also rat-free) in the Chatham group, then

these large islands may prove suitable for re-establishment of snipe. (There have been several recent reports of snipe on Pitt Island.)

One unmodified population

The only subspecies of New Zealand snipe that has escaped any major habitat modification or introduction of exotic mammals is the Snares Island snipe. The Snares are a small group of two islands and a number of stacks that lie about 100 km south of Stewart Island. Administered by the Department of Lands & Survey, they were designated a National Reserve in 1983 in recognition of their international importance as an unmodified ecosystem, and as breeding grounds for vast numbers of seabirds and seals.

Although only 330 hectares in area, The Snares are home to over three million pairs of muttonbirds, which have burrows under the central *olearia* forest and surrounding tussock grasslands. Snares crested penguins march inland from the few places that they can clamber ashore, following muddy highways to their noisy colonies under the forest. Buller's mollymawks sit