

# Lower Hutt

## THE STORY OF AN URBAN BRANCH

by Maureen Burgess, Chairperson,  
Lower Hutt Branch

When one looks back into the history of our National Society, one discovers that the Lower Hutt Branch is not very old. In the middle of 1975, two new sections were formed in the Wellington area: Lower Hutt and Upper Hutt. Although Upper Hutt gained Branch status the next year, it was not until November 1977 that Lower Hutt became a Branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society.

We are an urban Branch, with membership covering the valley floor (the city of Lower Hutt and the borough of Petone), the large valley suburb of Stokes Valley, the suburbs of the western hills, the Eastbourne coast, and the city 'over the hill' — Wainuiomata. Publicity about the aims and the work of the Society, coupled with displays highlighting the activities of our Branch appear to have worked well for us in our desire to increase membership. In the past 11 years our membership has increased from the initial 365 members to almost 3000.

Without any overall design the composition of the Lower Hutt Branch Committee has been spread geographically and in relation to age. Women have always played important roles, but it was not until 1985 that the Branch elected its first female chairperson. The number of Committee members is usually 16, but we place great emphasis on the work of the sub-committees. We try to include some non-Committee members on our sub-Committees so that we can introduce new people to our activities.

### Active branch

Our location can only partly serve to explain why Lower Hutt Branch is so active in trips, tree-planting, submission writing, and participating in local issues. To be an active Branch, you need active members, and we have always had a strong nucleus ready to both initiate new projects and to provide continued support for existing ones. Our location is really a bonus — we are surrounded by potential trips such as coastal walks, bush walks, high altitude trips, and trips to nearby islands.

The decision by the Wellington area branches in 1979 to put out a combined programme every six months, means that each of our members can choose from about 300 trips each year. We try to get our own trips and monthly meetings well advertised by means of a leaflet entitled "What's on this month" which we distribute to all local libraries and the news media. Our trips are not exclusively for members of Forest and Bird and we find that a lot of people who come on a trip with us then go on to join the Society. To help people decide whether the trip is suitable for them, each trip is classified by the Programme sub-Committee as: Easy, Family, Medium, Strenuous or Adventure.

The essence of Lower Hutt Branch is its



A two hour walk from either Eastbourne or the Wainuiomata coast will take you to the two Kohanga Lakes at the mouth of Gollans Valley. Spotless crane and pukeko breed here. Wetlands of their quality are not found elsewhere in Wellington, but they are under possible threat should a land-based sewage treatment plant be placed nearby. Photo: Ron Freeston

openness to ideas. If anybody wants to do something, they are encouraged to do it. This has led to our involvement in many exciting campaigns, some of the most recent being public education by Stan Butcher about the threat of Old Man's Beard (*Clematis vitalba*), protection for pingao grass on the beaches at Petone and Eastbourne, the fight to prevent a detention dam from being constructed in bush at the Korokoro forks, and the protection of the Gollan's Valley wetlands from the proposed sewage treatment plant.

Each of our Branch Chairpersons has introduced a new facet to our activities. Dave Carrad's aim was to involve people who would otherwise be unable to participate. He initiated our Veterans and Disabled Per-

sons Picnic which has now become an annual event at the Kaitoke Waterworks Reserve. The highlight for many of them is the billy-tea, and even those in wheelchairs are able to experience the pleasures of being in the bush. Because of David's involvement with Birthright, we also invite some of the local solo parent families on our trips.

### Organised opposition

Through the example of Russell Bell, our Branch has become very vocal in local and national issues. We have had many struggles in our area with developers wanting to do things that we opposed, but it was not until Russell wrote our Branch's submission