

— an investment in the future

the party kind so much as the making of choices between different interest groups. With more frequency questions are asked about the costs of preservation, employment, and who will pay. Politicians can only go so far as electors will let them go. So having voters who care about conservation can be critical. If conservation wants voter sympathy then it needs to get its message across to everyone.

As New Zealand becomes an urban nation that job of education gets bigger. Tomorrow's voter may well be a "townie" with no first-hand experience of nature or the conservation ethic. Offering that urban young person an appreciation of the outdoors is already recognised as a challenge for many branches.

Keeping concerns alive

Securing interest and support for conservation, particularly among younger people, may well have a critical effect on how New Zealanders regard their country in the future. Getting more young members is not about replacing the older activists. It is more a matter of keeping their concerns alive. Because of this the Society has decided to spend considerable energy on helping young New Zealanders to experience their natural heritage. Hopefully, then, they will want to preserve it.

The methods suggested vary: nearly all have great merit and we shall have to choose carefully.

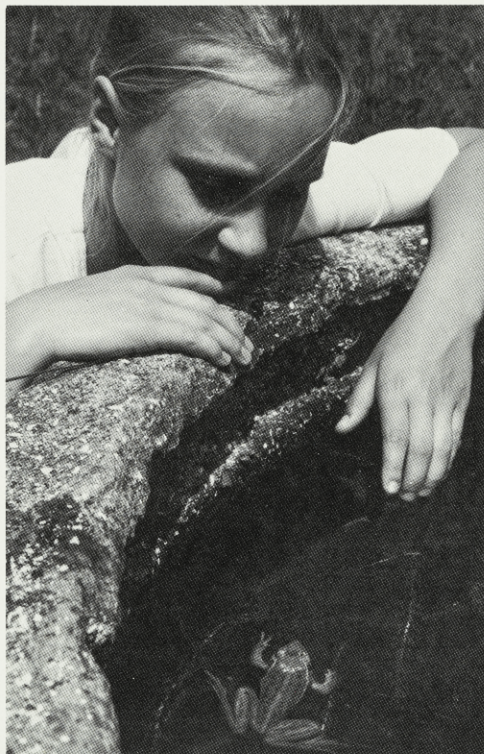
Many argue for a junior conservation movement in schools but there are problems there with an already overloaded curriculum and the integration of volunteers with teaching staff. Nevertheless it is obvious that where teachers are also active members of our Society many children have shown an early concern for nature which will stay with them a lifetime. From some such schools have come excellent community schemes in conservation.

Involvement of high school-age children and tertiary students identifies another problem in youth work. There is not just one group of young people to talk with. Interest levels and physical capability vary greatly with age. Some branches report success with adventure groups. Their experiences need recording to help others work in this way.

Modern high school curricula often give teenage children an understanding of scientific processes far in excess of their elders. Talking down to them through "pixie pages" in the journal is no longer appropriate. Yet understandably they rarely share the interests of a busload of older members on a field trip. In an increasingly competitive world they are pressed by examinations and

the whole business of learning about themselves and life. The teenage years may indeed be the latent years for conservationists. Yet they are so closely followed by work and family commitments.

Several branches report a failure to encourage young family membership while having great success with the sponsorship of junior naturalist movements. Here parents of younger children can meet at times and in ways which suit their busy timetables and conflicting responsibilities. By the simple expedient of using the family car they can afford to make field trips which would be prohibitive if everyone were to pay



A generation ago many New Zealanders lived closer to nature in rural areas than they do today. The challenge facing Forest and Bird in the future is to make the young appreciate environments far removed from their homes.

Photo: Gordon Ell

their fare on a Forest and Bird bus. Later, as family pressures ease, many become the younger and active members of Society branches.

Worth exploring

How branches promote and support such groups is worth exploring. How to adjust our own branch activities to cater for these different needs is another concern. Increasingly branches are generating activities for different age groups and interests: mid week trips for senior citizens for example may allow more active trips for younger members at weekends. In this way more

people get satisfaction from their membership.

Unfortunately this also generates twice the work for the usually overcommitted branch committee. When this militates against their work for conservation, (those time-demanding lobbies and appearances before committees), the environment suffers. Forest and Bird needs to know the simple "tricks" which help to run such social programmes so they do not get in the road of conservation activities.

Yet without these educational activities the conservation work would weaken. People appreciate the social aspects of Forest and Bird: it also helps maintain their support and generosity for the continual stream of conservation causes. A first concern for our youth activities/education person will be to gether in the broad experience of branches and make their successful methods available to all.

Then there should be support for the new surge of activities: practical on the ground leadership to help branches, and more subtle forms of support, for example with the manufacture of resources for use with younger people and integrating such production with the activities of other youth-orientated concerns. There needs to be a slice of environmental concern in the outdoor education programmes which, increasingly for city children, may well be their first contact with natural New Zealand. There is a great resource among our retired members interested in sharing their experiences with younger members if the raw materials, such as slide sets and posters, were readily available. Forest and Bird needs to take a constructive interest in proposals for a conservation corps and other schemes which involve young people in the outdoors.

So far we have recognised an area of real concern: ensuring that there will be enough people sufficiently interested to fight for the environment tomorrow. The forthcoming appeal for youth work should provide some mechanism to build on the rich variety of approaches already taken by many branches. Given a professional direction, it is hoped that our educational thrust will effectively support our team of environmental workers. *f*

Gordon Ell is National Deputy President of the Society and Chairman of its North Shore branch. Copies of his discussion paper Junior Activities were circulated to councillors last August. Further copies are available from Head Office to help branches make their suggestions in support of the national campaign for youth activities and education.