

# National Parks

*What do we think of them?*

by Kay Booth from the Department of Conservation who has carried out a survey on New Zealand's attitudes to and perceptions of national parks



The myth (left) opposed to the reality (right) of the majority of national park visitors. Most people like to walk, see the scenery or picnic in national parks. Photos: C Rudge and Conservation Department.

While you relax and enjoy reading this latest issue of *Forest & Bird*, here are a few questions to consider:

- should New Zealand have national parks?
- have you visited one recently?
- how many are there and can you name them?

No doubt you answered a firm yes to the first, and probably second question, and a good chance you replied 11 to the last (not forgetting our newest national park on the Wanganui River!). But what do *other* people think?

A recent study in Christchurch<sup>1</sup> put a number of questions, including those above, to over 300 members of the public

and found some interesting results:

- total support for national parks
- most people had visited a national park at some time but only half had visited one recently (in the last two years)
- not everyone knew what a national park was
- people thought national parks were primarily for preservation and secondarily for recreation.

By examining the public's use and attitudes towards parks more closely, a picture of how New Zealanders use and appreciate this resource may be built up. What better place to begin than within the parks themselves . . .