

years the most powerful in the Southern Hemisphere, and less known for its grazing and repeated burn-offs.

This destructive land-use finally ended in 1971 when the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Board assumed responsibility for the island and the enlightened policy of native forest regeneration was instituted.

By the late 1970s, however, it was becoming apparent that a thick barrier of rank grass, bracken and compacted soil was blocking the process of natural regeneration. It was about this time that Auckland University ornithologist John Craig and botanist Neil Mitchell began proposing the idea of mass tree-planting to accelerate the natural process. Craig and Mitchell also advocated the then radical idea of using Tiri as a sanctuary for rare native bird species but at the same time retaining the public's right to free access.

In 1979 they brought out a management plan for the island and soon after the Hauraki Gulf Maritime Park Board set up an environmental consultancy group which came to be known as the "Tiritiri Matangi Committee". This committee built on the ideas embodied in the management plan and produced some of its own.

Open Sanctuary

In 1982 Sir Peter Scott, son of the famous Antarctic explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott, was in New Zealand to look at suitable projects for the World Wildlife Fund to support. The Tiritiri Matangi project caught his imagination and it was Scott who first coined the now popular term "open sanctuary" in reference to the island. At Scott's direction World Wildlife Fund set up a fundraising committee and over \$40,000 was quickly raised by public subscription. With a two-to-one government subsidy this grew to near \$150,000 — enough to get the project up and running.

The hard toil necessary to turn drawing board plans into reality was undertaken on Tiri by landscape architect Mike Cole and Tiri's park ranger (and last lighthouse keeper) Ray Walter.

In 1983 a large shadehouse complex was completed and Cole and Walter began the process of germinating seeds gathered from the island's remnant native bush.

Interestingly Tiri, unlike its surrounding region, grew no kauri. Instead the island was clothed in a rich mosaic of northern broadleaf coastal forest dominated by pohutukawa, kohekohe, puriri, karaka and taraire.

In all 29 different species were propagated including half a dozen from Little Barrier Island (Hauturu). These latter such as toropapa, taurepo and native fuchsia are nectar and berry producing shrubs which were considered an essential additional food source for the prospective population of stitchbirds.

By autumn 1984 30,000 young trees standing out in their Canadian plastic root-trainers were awaiting planting.

The main worry now for project organisers was how to get all these trees into the ground. PEP schemes were proposed but the difficulty in housing and feeding the required small army of workers made the idea impractical. It became clear then that



Forest and Bird volunteers planting trees. Photo: Louise Stevens.

the project would stand or fall on long term voluntary labour — something which had never been tried on such a large scale before.

In May 1984 two launch loads of Waiheke Forest and Bird members made a stormy crossing to Tiri. Despite high winds and torrential rain (1.9 inches) the volunteers managed to plant two thousand trees.

The revegetation of Tiri was underway.

Mass Awareness

In May this year I visited the island once again with a party of Waiheke tree-planters. Unlike our first visit three years ago the weather was kind and after sedately planting our quota of 500 trees we were taken on a tour of the island by Ray Walter.

Ray, a bluff former seafarer, has been sole manager of the project on Tiri for the past two years.

His popular daily reports on Auckland's Radio Pacific (weather, fishing and latest news on the Tiri project) played no small part in gaining the mass awareness and support which has made the project such a success. Indeed any tourist entrepreneur would be envious of Ray's engagement book. Trips to the island are now limited to three per week and are booked solid for a year ahead by a remarkable variety of clubs, schools and service organisations.

A typical page in Ray's diary shows bookings for North Shore Forest and Bird (keen supporters from the start), the sixth and seventh form, Otamatea College, and an over-sixties group from the Hibiscus Coast Horticultural Society.

With an enthusiastic labour force and an excellent growth rate (believed to have been boosted by the higher than average summer rainfall for the projects first three years and the handful of urea/osmocote fertiliser mixture planted with each tree) the project is now two years ahead of schedule.

This year the 100,000th tree will be planted and it is estimated that only three more years of intensive planting is required before the project begins to wind down and the revegetation of the neighbouring rodent-free Motuora (79 ha) begins.

Even at this stage of its development the

Tiritiri Matangi 'Open Sanctuary' boasts some remarkable features, such as the bird release programme.

Thriving kakariki

This began more or less accidentally in 1974 when a cargo of aviary-bred red-crowned parakeets, kakariki, were released on the island after weather conditions made a landing on their original destination of Cuvier Island impossible.

On Tiri the kakariki have thrived and large chattering flocks of the little green and red parrot move from valley to valley secure from the predators which have nearly wiped them out on the mainland.

In February 1984 22 North Island saddlebacks, tieke, including six known breeding pairs were released on Tiri. This ancient New Zealand wattle-bird, a cousin of the extinct huia, has itself fought back from the brink of extinction and now the Tiri population is estimated to be over sixty. Its distinctive call can now be heard echoing all over the island. With the aid of a tape-recorder the inquisitive bird can be "called" into view — its striking jet-black and orange plumage recall an old Aotearoa nearly lost. At this stage 30 different bird species nest on Tiri and a further 11 species visit. Other birds planned for relocation to the island are the little spotted kiwi, (from Kapiti Island), the brown teal, whitehead, stitchbird and perhaps even the takahe.

The translocations of these birds still await approval from government wildlife authorities but there is a strong feeling amongst Tiri project supporters that vital decisions on matters such as bird liberations which have been delayed for many months should be made soon if the project is to maintain its momentum.

The Open Sanctuary has also become a focus for scientific research and interesting information on the island's natural history is coming to light. Scientist Mary Roberts is carrying out research on internal parasites in the island's large population of native rat, kiore which is another creature virtually extinct on mainland New Zealand. Though the kiore has been in New Zealand for over