

# DEAN • ROWALLAN • LONGWOOD

... Southland World Heritage Forests in Danger ...

By Gerry McSweeney, Conservation Director

Three magnificent lowland beech and rimu forests cover rolling hills on both sides of the Waiau River valley east of Fiordland National Park. Together with the adjoining 45,000 hectare Waitutu State Forest these publicly-owned lowland forests complement the mountains of Fiordland National Park. Dean and Rowallan are both part of the proposed South-West New Zealand World Heritage Site, and at present Rowallan forest is being ransacked by the Forestry Corporation at taxpayers' expense.

When the Fiordland boundary was drawn in 1904, Dean, Rowallan and Longwood forests were excluded from protection because they contained merchantable timber. Today, although their conservation values are finally being recognised, Rowallan is being devastated by woodchipping and Dean and Longwood are threatened with sale to the Forestry Corporation for logging.

The Government will determine the future of these forests by March 31 this year and Environment Associate Minister Philip Woollaston has promised that if they are zoned for protection the forests will be included in a World Heritage nomination for South-West New Zealand.

## Lowland Wilderness Vital for Wildlife

The forests are important for two reasons: they protect the ecological integrity of Fiordland by preserving a sequence of forests from lowlands to mountains, and they are crucial to the future of seriously threatened native birds such as kaka, parakeet and yellowhead. They are a national stronghold for these spectacular birds.

"All the remaining virgin forest including old cutover with a regenerated canopy must be excluded from timber production areas," was the strong message from the Conservation Department to the Government in recent land allocation negotiations.

Conservation Department staff, and before them the Wildlife Service, have carried out bird surveys throughout the forests. Nationally important populations of kaka and parakeet were found. These parrots need extensive areas of unmodified forests — particularly beech forest — for feeding and breeding.

*Pattern of how parakeets responded to logging in Rowallan forest. Birds showing a similar reaction to logging are pigeon, rifleman, kaka (pictured) and yellowhead. The decline in bird counts comes about because the old trees with nesting holes have been removed. Even after 25 years very few of these birds are recorded in logged forests. (from Beech management - its effect on bird population, by Eric Spurr, Forest Research Institute).*

In addition the surveys show that yellowhead are common in parts, especially in the valley floor beech forests. Such forests have largely been cleared elsewhere in New Zealand.



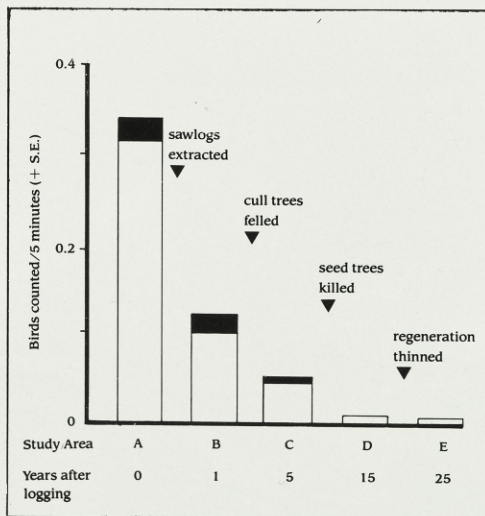
land. Confined to the South Island, yellowhead have suffered a major contraction in their distribution since the 1950s, and are mostly found in the native, lowland forested valleys around the Landsborough Valley (South Westland) and east of the Main Divide in Otago and Southland.

The Forest Research Institute has carried out a wildlife survey of cutover parts of Rowallan forest, which shows that logging eliminates yellowhead, kaka and parakeet from the forest and that even after 25 years the birds do not return. This is because the mature and old trees which are rich in insect food and also offer nest holes for breeding have been logged out.

The insanity of one section of government spending millions to save some endangered species for extinction, while another pushes other threatened species to the brink of extinction, is nowhere better highlighted than in these Western Southland forests.

So far DoC's plea for protection has not been successful. Much of Dean, Rowallan and Longwood remains zoned for logging. However, conservationists have recently succeeded in retaining the forests in interim Crown control with the Department of Lands, after they were initially scheduled in early 1987 for sale to the Forestry Corporation.

*The most immediately threatened of the World Heritage forests are in Western Southland. Logging has now extended almost to the east branch of the Rowallan River along ridge crest roadways. The valley beech and rimu forest will be next to go if the Government renews logging contracts later this year.*



## Corporation Push for Logging

The Forestry Corporation are pushing hard for ownership of the forests. To back its case it has recently organised a PR tour of Rowallan for Southland local authorities. The Southland United Council has asked for logging to continue, and the Auckland-based company Wood Export Tokanui Ltd (also part Japanese-financed) which runs the huge Awarua woodchip mill near Invercargill is also lobbying hard for continued chipping in Rowallan.

The Awarua mill is described by Southland Forest and Bird secretary Audrey Gamble as a "blight on the province". From Rowallan in the west to the Catlins in the east, the mill is stripping forest off publicly and privately-owned land.

Rowallan State Forest now has the dubious distinction of being the scene of the largest native forest logging operation in New Zealand. There is a long term sale of 8000 cubic metres of beech and rimu sawlogs to the Lindsay and Dixon (now Paynters) sawmill in Tuatapere. This expires on July 31 this year. Arising from this logging is around 40,000 cubic metres of woodchip which goes to the Awarua mill. Conserva-