

# NORTHERN BRANCH ISLANDS · MANGROVES · KAURI

*New Forest and Bird branches have sprung up all over the country in recent years. One such is the Northern branch, based in Whangarei. Their vice chairperson Alan Willis and committee member Gerry Brackenbury have written this article on the trials and tribulations of forming a branch and on the main issues in their region.*

The Northern branch was originally set up in 1985 as a section on the recommendation of the mid-North branch, which helped to get the ball rolling with a \$100 donation. However, in the initial stages lack of finance was a hurdle which was partly overcome by committee members generously donating their own funds to get the branch running.

We feel the branch has achieved much in our two short years of existence, and our enthusiasm remains high through thick and thin.

One of our initiatives has been the turning back of Limestone Island (Matakohe Island) from pasture to bush, thereby creating a valuable bush reserve close to the heart of Whangarei city. Initially we wanted the whole island to be replanted, but it was soon brought to our attention that the island had many other values — it is also rich in Maori and Pakeha history. A rare

ringed ditch pa is clearly visible on the summit and the whole north-facing slope contained agriculture lines. At this point local Maori also became actively interested in the project.

Many meetings later — with the Historic Places Trust, Te Roopu kaumatua, Whangarei City Council, Northland Harbour Board, QE II National Trust and the Whangarei County Council — we feel that our ideas are gaining acceptance and it will not be long before Whangarei has one more jewel in its environmental crown.

Another issue our branch has been getting its teeth into is an attempt to reintroduce bellbirds into Northland. This has been an exercise in frustration and bureaucracy. Gerry Brackenbury first wrote letters three years ago to various interested parties with mixed results. However, with the creation of the Conservation Department, there is now a stronger likelihood that Northland will

once again be the home of this beautiful bird.

The two issues we have put most effort into recently are our attempts to save mangroves in Whangarei Harbour and to retain Punaruku kauri forest within the Conservation Department.

## Mangroves

In the upper reaches of Whangarei Harbour stands a small residual example of mature mangrove trees that must have been there for a very long time. One of the largest measures 10 metres in height and just over one metre in diameter. Unfortunately over time fewer and fewer mangroves have remained here, as they have been used as convenient rubbish tips. Permission was obtained in the early 1970s to flatten and reclaim this vestigial area of 10 hectares. All that is standing is four hectares; the rest is parking space for trucks.



Above: The gaunt skeletons of trees ringbarked by the Forest Service as part of the Kauri Management Programme, prior to 1982. Many of the trees so treated are towai. Opposite: Punaruku forest, with kauri rickers on a ridgetop and a large kauri in the middle distance, spared because it has been scarred by gumbleeding notches. All photos: Terry Fitzgibbon