

a Maori perspective on Conservation

Lee: I am extremely confident that an even closer working relationship will evolve between us. Conservationists should be prepared to support Maori issues such as the fight against pounamu pillaging in the south and the disturbance and abuse of urupa (burial grounds) to extract ironsands in the north.

Forest and Bird: The November 1987 issue of *Nga Kaitiaki*, the Conservation Department newsletter, has an article on the Maori conservation ethic and interviews with Tipene O'Regan, Pat Park and Te Aue Davis. It presents a strong case for allowing Maori people controlled harvest of natural resources from DoC lands. It argues that there is likely to be conflict between the department's preservation goals and Maori techniques of sustained management. Do you also believe that a preservation ethic (as opposed to a conservation or harvest ethic) is alien to the traditional and contemporary Maori relationship with nature?

Lee: My people have always recognised the wisdom of democratic social control of precious resources for the common good as well as for nature's own sake. The tragic effect of the ecological holocaust on the children of Tane reveals that 10 percent of the



Sandra Lee and her great aunt, a kaumatua, at Arahura, near Hokitika.

planet's total endangered species of birdlife may be found in Aotearoa, this in spite of the promises contained in the Treaty. So of course I support the preservation ethic for our forests and birds. The issue today is simply one of preservation or destruction — and therefore extinction.

In this era of the Maori renaissance I am positive that our culture will thrive and is not dependent on the consumption of threatened species to achieve this.

Forest and Bird: Influenced by the perspective of Mr O'Regan and others, the Conservation Department is now examining amending our protected area and species legislation to make it easier for traditional

harvest from reserves and is also initiating research into sustained harvest techniques. Do you think such amendments could set dangerous precedents? Could they be exploited by unscrupulous entrepreneurs?

Lee: I would be happier if DoC discussed these sorts of issues more in the tribal areas in the traditional tribal way. Why is it that the view of one or a few Maoris is often assumed to be the view of us all? Most Maori people do not make the same assumption with Pakeha.

Greedy people always take advantage of the weakness of legislation to make a fast dollar. To assume that conservation legislation will be any more respected than, say, the Town and Country Planning Act is, I suspect, naive. I would be disappointed to see the legislation made any more vulnerable than it is already is. I came down and argued this case in March 1987 before the Select Committee considering the Conservation Bill.

Forest and Bird: In the same *Nga Kaitiaki* article, Tipene O'Regan discusses kukupa (kereru, native pigeon) harvest. He argues that even though many of the rituals and customs concerning hunting are no longer practised, old mechanisms can be revised. Do you see it necessary or appropriate to revive pre-European activities like kereru harvest in view of their severely reduced habitat and numbers, improved hunting techniques and the birds' inability to breed quickly?

Lee: I have hand-reared several of these chubby charmers. In each case they were orphaned by humans tampering with kukupa's immediate environment. I'm aware of one case where an elder "shot out" almost completely an area once plentiful with these birds. Today, rather than seeing kukupa as a "food resource", we must see them as sustaining us in a more important way, as Kaitiaki of the Kakahu of Papa (guardians of the cloak of the Earth mother) proclaiming Aotearoa — ours — unique.

Forest and Bird: Many Pakeha feel some discomfort about the land claims before the Waitangi Tribunal — often unaware of the injustices by which the land was acquired from its rightful owners. Maori concern about land alienation has been heightened by the large scale sale of land to effectively private state corporations. This has precipitated many of the claims. Are there also concerns that Maori land is still being alienated?



Islands in the Gulf. Looking out to Little Barrier Island from Waiheke Island, where Sandra Lee lives. Photo: Gordon Ell, Bush Press

Lee: Perhaps those who do feel discomfort should consider the possible consequences of not allowing these grievances to be finally aired. Maori concern regarding land alienation to private state corporations is obvious and justified. There are still cases where our existing reservations can and are still being alienated even by our own people.

Forest and Bird: What priorities do you see for Forest and Bird to develop closer liaison and cooperation with the Maori people?

Lee: I have heard some of my elders say Pakeha are all conservationists when it comes to Maori land. I think there has been a feeling that there was an attitude of "what's yours is mine and mine's my own". The conservation movement and Forest and Bird must be fair and consistent with, and considerate of, Maori perspectives when dealing with conservation matters. Our first priority must be the development of better communication and trust between us, and the realisation that many of our aspirations in terms of conservation values are the same.

A big challenge facing me — and I think all of us in Forest and Bird, is to strengthen that partnership. 🦋