

# NEW ZEALAND CONSERVATION CORPS

*Is the Conservation Corps simply a means of soaking up unemployment as its detractors claim or has it been a worthwhile initiative? Senior conservation officer for the Department of Conservation and coordinator of the programme Christine Smith, outlines some its achievements to date.*

## Ingredients

- Protecting important pa sites, eradicating mice on an island, developing walking tracks, doing a wild animal control assessment, surveying and planting endangered plants, building breeding enclosures, restoring historic buildings, tracking kereru (wood pigeon).
- Marae committees, polytechnics, government departments, voluntary organisations, private organisations . . .
- Young people, educators, conservationists, kaumatua . . .
- The Minister of Youth Affairs, Employment and Associate Education, the Minister of Conservation . . .
- The Departments of Conservation, Education, Labour and Office of Youth Affairs . . .
- Enthusiasm, commitment, energy, vision, caring . . .
- North, south, east and west.

## Method

Mix all ingredients together.

Cook for 6-12 months in a caring environment.

The NZ Conservation Corps pilot scheme was launched by the Minister of Conservation and Youth Affairs, Employment and Associate Education in October 1988. Corps members are aged 16-23, and are paid a training allowance. About 150 project applications were received but only 19 of those could be supported from the funds available.

The first of the pilot NZ Conservation Corps (NZCC) programmes to get underway was that run by the DSIR's ecology division. The conservation projects being undertaken by the six members include wasp control, checking on the re-establishment of birds and lizards on islands in Breaksea Sound, Fiordland, helping evaluate whether rodent eradication from islands is worth the expense and helping research on New Zealand pigeons. This will give the young people training and experience in the field techniques for conserving endangered birds, insects and plants.

Further south at Kaiapoi, another group of young people are working on an important archaeological site: Kaiapohia Pa. The strategic importance of this pa is no longer obvious as 150 years of wetland drainage and reclamation have radically changed the original environment. Conservation Corps members on this project will be working to re-establish representative areas of both wetland and forest to give future generations a better understanding of the significance of the pa. Already the members have unearthed some



Top: Tim Harcourt feeding kaka on Kapiti Island. The Corps stay on Kapiti for one week per month working on a new track and saddleback/tieke breeding boxes. Photo: Chris Ferkins. Left: Airlift! – bringing materials across to Kapiti Island for track and tieke roosting and nesting box and takahe pen construction – 35 trips in all. Photo: Chris Ferkins. Right: Left to right: Rachel McKay, Paul Kayes and Tim Harcourt building a track on the north side of Pauatahanui Reserve. Photo: Chris Ferkins

interesting material; in preparing to fence off an area around the pa, an old palisade post was uncovered.

Up the east coast to Hawkes Bay and the Napier YMCA Conservation Corps members are hard at work restoring and enhancing the southern shoreline of the Ahuriri Estuary. Over the years, urban and industrial development has encroached onto the estuary. The project involves conservation and landscape planting to limit further encroachment and enhance the visual and wildlife values of the area. To help the public better appreciate this special environment, a walkway is also planned.

Rewi Alley, with his philosophy of "Gung Ho" (working together), is a person who is likely to have approved of the Conservation Corps. So it is appropriate that one of the pro-

jects is the preservation of the farm cottage he lived in from 1921 until 1927 when he left for China. The Conservation Corps members involved in this project are clocking up the kilometres because as well as the Rewi Alley house at Moeawatea (Taranaki hinterlands), they are also restoring the Gardener Down-draught Kiln in New Lynn. A young man named Warren describes it this way:

"There is always going to be another lovely little building or site to save surrounded by gorse; alone and dying.

Then over the brow of the hill comes the Conservation Corps armed with slashers and hammers and saws. You're saved, little house. The Conservation Corps is here."

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