

## Conservation East and West

Japan presents us with a huge paradox.

Ask a Japanese about the Japanese attitude towards nature and you might unlock a tantalizing picture – of pilgrimages to see cherry blossoms in spring, of the reverence for wild inherent in Shinto, of nature reflected in poetry, songs, paintings and dances.

Despite a massive population (120 million) crowded onto islands only a third larger again than New Zealand, Japan has an abundance of species: 130 mammals, over 500 different birds, 50 amphibians, 76 reptiles and around 100,000 species of insects. 70 percent of the country's land area is covered in forest, 40 percent of that plantations. These forests support more than 6000 plant species.

Contrast that picture with the international denigration that is now being poured onto Japan. "Eco-outlaw", "eco-terrorist", and "eco-predator" are just a few of the less than flattering terms being applied to this enormously wealthy nation as it devours up many of the world's priceless resources. Drift netting, tropical rainforest destruction, the possible extinction of the wild African elephant (its ivory is made into chopsticks) – much of the blame for these ecological catastrophes can be laid at Japan's door.

The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society joins in this general condemnation. In this quarter's mail order catalogue you will find an advertisement for a new poster aimed directly at Japan for the way in which it is ransacking our native forests for woodchips. However, we would be hypocrites if we concentrated our attack solely on the Japanese. They may be welcome buyers, but New Zealanders are ready sellers.

Two woodchip mills taking timber out of private forest around Nelson and Marlborough, and Southland, are involved in the export trade. For too long the companies which own the mills – one of them Newmans which purports to show travellers "beautiful New Zealand" – have shown disregard for the ecological vandalism they are causing. Ominously, there is a prospect of a third woodchip mill starting on the West Coast, stronghold of our native forests.

The Labour Government, which has had up until now an excellent environmental record (Antarctica and the woodchip trade are two major blots on their copybook), has it in its power to stop the export of native woodchips overnight. It should be a simple decision. The majority of the public would fully support it.

We hope that Forest and Bird members will get behind this campaign, which we see as the largest forest campaign in the next few months. Your support will be vital, as it always has been.

Such actions, small though they may be on a global scale, could awaken the consciences of Japanese to what they are doing. Incredibly, there are only 17,000 members in Japan's largest conservation organisation, the Wild Bird Society of Japan. However, the Japanese have shown an ability to excel in whatever path they choose to follow. It may well be that, once they set their hearts on conservation, they could one day set an example for the rest of the world to try and emulate.

Gerard Hutching



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Head Office: Seventh Floor, Central House, 26 Brandon Street, Wellington.

Postal address: P.O. Box 631, Wellington

Editor: Gerard Hutching

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