



All photos: Rod Morris

# W/ETA W/ARFARE

**F**OR THE AVERAGE PERSON Latin scientific names are often a mouthful, but one recently discovered species of weta should be easy to pronounce: “Jaws” is the affectionate name assigned to an as-yet-undescribed weta found on Middle Mercury Island off the Coromandel coast.

To all intents and purposes the weta resembles the giant wetas (*Deinacrida* spp.; refer *Forest & Bird* May 1988) and like most of them is found only on an isolated island without predatory mammals. However, we now know that they are not even closely related. Certainly in one respect it is strikingly different: the male of this species has a greatly enlarged head with a prominent “tusk” adorning the mandible or jaw. The female, on the other hand, has a smaller head with no “tusk”.

Adults of both sexes weigh 25-28g (about the size of a rifleman), while the male is up to 9cm to the tip of the “tusk”. Little is known about the weta which was first discovered by DSIR scientist Tony Whitaker in 1970. Another scientist, Ian Southey, also made sightings in