



The huia, one of the spectacular bird species lost in the last 100 years. Photo: Rod Morris

of taro, yam and breadfruit. These Polynesian immigrants also brought kiore and kuri (their rat and dog).

A thousand years later when Europeans arrived and colonised, New Zealand had lost 23 percent of its forests and 30 percent of its birdlife, the most notable loss being the various moa species. But with European settlement forest clearance accelerated, wetland drainage started in earnest and native animal species were exterminated at an ever-increasing pace.

By 1900 some people were lamenting the loss of New Zealand's unique natural heritage and attempts were made to arrest the destruction. This saw the passing of laws for national parks, reserves, scenery protection, bird protection and better management of forests. But the forces of development and destruction still had their feet firmly on the accelerator, and the clearance of forests, wetlands, and tussocklands was accompanied by the continual introduction of exotic predators (rats, mustelids, hedgehog), browsers (possum, wallaby, deer, goats, rabbit, hare) and plants (*Clematis vitalba*, buddleia, marram, *Spartina*).

Conservation 1990

Despite the dramatic conservation advances of recent years, we still have the following situation:

- A land and water planning system that is biased towards development and destruction of indigenous natural values.
- No protection for the habitats of native wildlife.

- No protection for rare and endangered ecosystems.
- An unenforceable national wetlands policy.
- The destruction of New Zealand rainforests by export woodchipping driven by Japanese demand for hardwood pulp.
- An underfunded conservation sector which cannot control serious outbreaks of noxious animals (deer, thar, goat, possum) or is unable to purchase many threatened areas.

The past decade has seen some slowing down of the loss of natural ecosystems, in particular the end to forest clearance and wetland drainage incentives and an end to these activities by Government departments. But the onslaught has continued through the inadequacies of land and water planning for

private land and because of the outdated attitude of the politicians, planners and engineers who keep it running.

Resource Management Law

The new resource law could be a major breakthrough for our indigenous heritage. In its draft principles "regard must be taken of the importance of the maintenance of natural features and the effect on ecosystems, ecological processes and biological diversity." Our challenge now is to get these lofty words into national, regional and local planning systems for land, water and coastal use.

The new Heritage Order in our resource laws now gives us a chance to protect and preserve special features of our natural heritage that are threatened. But the large sums needed to compensate private landowners from destroying areas protected by such a heritage order will mean that these will only be used for small sites, which are generally insignificant to threatened native species and ecosystems.

It took conservation groups ten years to get some protection for forests, wetlands and coastal areas in the Town and Country Planning Act. We must hope the new planning system will prevent threatened species and ecosystems from being further compromised by so-called "balanced" decisions, which invariably favour development and destruction of natural heritage values.

Species and Habitat Protection

Changes to the planning system are not

