

A similar toll has been wrought on native animals in those formerly indigenous ecosystems. From the few studies our scientists are carrying out (on kiwi, kaka, kokako or yellow-eyed penguin for example), we know that such ancient and unique birds are continuing to decline. Arresting that decline will take a mammoth effort and mean species will have to be managed – not an inviting thought perhaps, but if predators or possums and deer continue to menace native animals, management is the only option for many mainland species. New Zealand must reverse the trend of destruction of our species and ecosystems. We must take a deliberate step to protect our natural values and to enhance those ecosystems and natural areas that remain. Perhaps we could give the original inhabitants of New Zealand a special 1990 celebration gift by:



- giving legal protection to threatened plants and the habitats of all threatened species.
- having binding national policy statements for the protection of native habitats, ready for when the resource management law is passed in July.
- a nationally co-ordinated and properly funded eradication and control programmes for pests such as possums and goats.
- Removal of the moratorium on commercial hunting of thar.

This would help ensure that our obligation to pass on New Zealand's treasures to future generations is observed. Our failure to do so will not be forgiven. 🦉

No cause for mirth: the extinct laughing owl, one of the few nocturnal bird predators New Zealand had. Photo: Rod Morris

Deer: Game or Pest?

DEER ARE A NOXIOUS PEST. Some claim they merely duplicate the browsing moa, but New Zealand's vegetation evolved with the moa and in a biologically-balanced relationship. Deer have virtually exterminated many palatable native plants from our forests. In Fiordland, for example, only two colonies of the endangered tussock

Chionchloa spiralis remain following deer browsing.

Deer threaten our bird species too. In Pureora deer have eliminated most of the kokako food species from the lower forest tiers. In Northland's deer-free forests, kokako in Puketi feed right down to the ground as plant food species still grow in the lowest for-

est tiers. Kokako are found in lower densities in deer-plagued forests of Pureroa, Puketi and Rotoehu.

In Fiordland deer feed on prime takahe food plants, and by selective browsing kill off tussocks important to the takahe.



Claims that the status of deer should be upgraded from that of pests to protected game animals are hotly disputed by conservationists.