

## Giant Weta Breeding Success

**I**T WOULD NEVER BE the world's most popular species breeding programme. Nevertheless, when the plight of the Mahoenui giant weta became known in 1988, Forest and Bird members embraced the cause of weta conservation and provided funds for breeding boxes and a shade house.

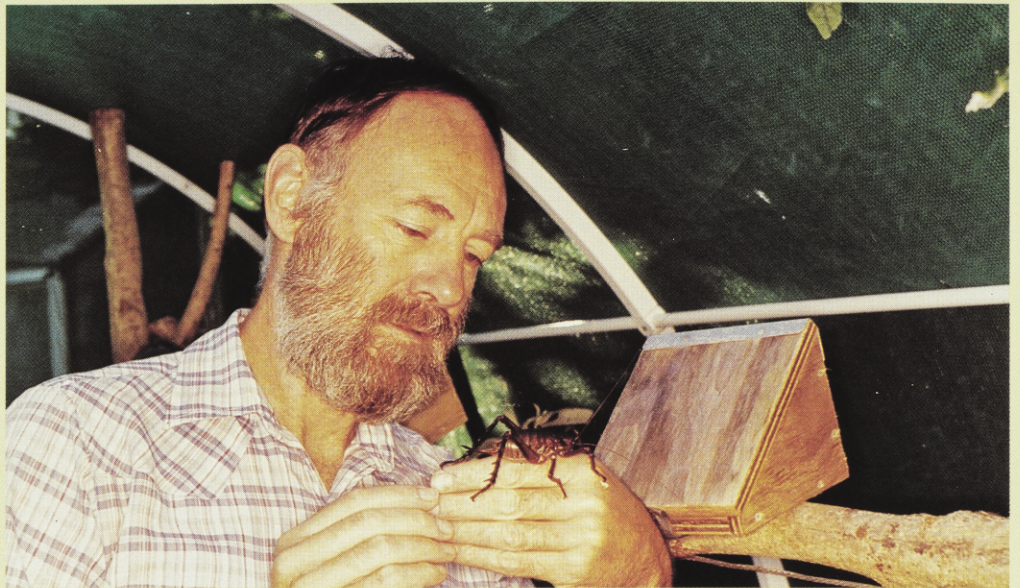
That was the first stage in a drawn out process that finally saw a dozen weta hatch in DSIR scientist Dr Mike Meads' back garden this January. The success of the programme provides hope that the vulnerable species – at present confined to 460 hectares of King Country gorse for which the Department of Conservation has paid \$30,000 – has a future.

Breeding the giant weta has been a hit and miss affair. After keeping the adults in a sterile laboratory failed to encourage them to mate, Dr Meads moved them into more natural surroundings, including furnishing their new quarters with some Mahoenui gorse. By February 1989 mating had occurred but egg laying was proving a problem. At that point Dr Meads' garden sprinkler came to the rescue, and the damper conditions spurred the females into laying eggs.

However, weta fanciers had a longer wait than usual before the eggs hatched. Instead of the normal few weeks the process should take, 10 months passed before an elated Mike Meads could tell the world that Mahoenui offspring had arrived. These are likely to be released on predator-free offshore islands, offering the security of more than one population of the species. 🦗

*Dr Mike Meads and one of the Mahoenui giant weta. He is standing inside the shade house and in front of a weta breeding box – both donated by Forest and Bird members.*

*An egg of the giant weta and one of the hatchlings just a few days old. Photos: Mike Meads*



## An Arresting Sight

**I**N AUGUST WE PUBLISHED a photo of Helen and Adrian Harrison's dotterel notice on Ohope Beach. This advertised the fact that the beach was a bird resting area and that people should stay clear.

Come spring the Harrisons decided to update the notice to reflect that time of the year (left). 🦗

