



A Special Place for Birds

by Rod Hay



A MAN PHONES the talkback show just to say how much he appreciates the sparrows coming to his garden. Little children shriek with delight as the ducks in the park take pieces of bread from their outstretched fingers. Ferry passengers marvel at the grace of an albatross as its wing tip grazes the surface of the water before it effortlessly swoops up to hang in the air above the ship. A group of trampers sits entranced by the pure notes of a kokako song wafting over them from the tall rimu tree above.

From everyday encounters in the garden to the excitement of seeing and hearing a rare

species, there is little doubt that birds hold a special place in many of our lives. Indeed, that special place is a part of most human cultures, from the falconers of the Middle East to the fishing communities of the South Pacific, and from the feather-bedecked Papua New Guinea highlanders to the bird-watching enthusiasts of Britain. As an ornithologist, but as a mere layman in human behaviour, perhaps I am only half qualified to judge what birds mean to us. However, like anyone, I can observe the relationships between the avian and human species and speculate on what they mean to us and the responsibilities they

Above: Coy and seldom seen close up but filling the bush with its cries, the Rarotonga fruit dove is an endemic species which will benefit from attempts to protect habitat for other species.

All photos Rod Hay

Left: The cagou, an ancient endemic species only distantly related to other bird families, is the symbol of New Caledonia. Despite that, the population is a remnant of those that existed 100 years ago.