

(five hours boat trip distant) but subsequently discovered that ship rats were now on the island, having arrived there since a new wharf had been built several years earlier. Re-introduction is now probably futile. Moreover, the birds of Ua Huka are also at risk if the lesson of Ua Pou, like so many islands before it, is not learned soon.

What Do We Owe The Birds?

We are in the midst of an extinction episode unparalleled in the history of the Earth. Whilst mass extinctions in the past, such as the loss of dinosaurs, were caused by natural events, the recent wave of losses is the result of our influence. It is not as yet under our control, though it should be.

New Zealand was a land of birds. Isolated from the rest of the world's land masses since before the age of mammals, our relationship with hairy vertebrates has been a recent (though traumatic) one. Hence, although our isolation and small size renders us a country of a relatively small number of native species, the variety and uniqueness of our birds (and many of our other life forms) renders them particularly special on a global scale. The kiwi, kokako, rifleman and rock wren, kakapo, kereru, Cook's petrel, shore plover and wrybill are all part of what contribute to the Earth's biological diversity, and we owe it to the Earth to afford them a place to live.

In particular, we owe something to those species which we use as a national, state or

territorial symbols. The kiwi is our bird, and we proudly call ourselves kiwis, yet our treatment of the national symbol leaves a lot to be desired. We are not alone in this neglect, however. In New Caledonia, images of the cagou adorn buildings, coats of arms and tourist memorabilia, yet the birds themselves suffer from predation, hunting and loss of habitat.

That attitude need not prevail, though often it is rarity itself which results in a species being valued. Information about the 30 or so remaining kakerori (*Rarotonga flycatchers*) led to the species being adopted, for a while at least, as the symbol of the Cook Islands Conservation Service. Public awareness increased, efforts to protect the species were

