

Focus on Birds

This issue is something of a celebration of our birds; from the delights of bird watching by an enthusiast and scientist, to a recounting of some classic rare bird rescues. In this way it reflects both that enthusiasm for the outdoors and the commitment to its conservation which drives our Society.

The focus on birds is fitting this sesquicentennial year, for New Zealand is to host two major conferences of international ornithology late in 1990. The 20th International Ornithological Conference already has 1,300 people enrolled. The International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) will also hold its conference here at the same time. Ornithologists and bird watchers will be touring New Zealand and its sub-Antarctic islands in a programme which will increase awareness of our situation in organisations which have previously been predominately European in their outlook.

The ICBP conference is of particular interest to Forest and Bird for, officially, we constitute its New Zealand branch. The IOC conference will involve members who also belong to the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, and many have volunteered to lead field trips or help in the organisation of functions and the reception of visitors.

OSNZ represents the scientific side of ornithology, bringing together scholars and amateurs in a co-ordinated programme to find out more about our birdlife. Forest and Bird provides a further perspective: an active advocacy for wildlife and habitat which lies beyond the concerns of objective science.

Nevertheless, Forest and Bird has demonstrated a commitment to the scientific and conservation programmes for birds. Our volunteers assist with expeditions, our grants assist scientific research and our funds have helped with the purchase of key habitat, including Maud and Mangere Islands. In recent years the Society has funded bird conservation work in the South Pacific and has helped identify national parks and reserves in Fiji, including a reserve for the rare Vanua Levu silk-tail.

While birds feature in our Society title they do so, however, as a symbol of our much wider concern for all native wildlife – just as the name forest in our title is only a symbol for all habitats and scenery protection.

Those symbolic concerns for Forest and Bird are still sometimes misunderstood as our sole interests – “the twigs and tweets” people. Increasingly though our real job of conservation advocacy is recognised by business and government, where our lobbies on behalf of the environment have become part of the decision-making process.

Forest and Bird, nowadays, often seems a serious organisation strictly dedicated to conservation “battles”. Yet it can also be a vehicle for personal discovery and enjoyment of the outdoors and nature. It was probably a bird (or animal) or a forest (or place) which first inspired each member to join the Society in support of conservation. So, in a way, this “birds issue” of the journal is a celebration of our original interests.

Gordon Ell
President



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