

The Birders are Coming!

AT THE END OF THIS YEAR there will be a mass migration of ornithologists, bird watchers and bird conservationists from around the world to New Zealand. The attraction is the World of Birds, three weeks of sheer heaven for bird enthusiasts.

First in the feathery line-up is the 20th world conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP), which will be held in Hamilton from 19-27 November. ICBP is the oldest international conservation organisation in the world, and was founded in 1922 with the aim of protecting wild birds and their habitats. It is a federation of 330 member organisations, including Forest and Bird, and it has representatives in 100 countries. Its headquarters are at Cambridge, in the UK, where it employs about 20 permanent staff. The Director of ICBP, Christoph Imboden, has a strong interest and fondness for New Zealand, having worked with DSIR Ecology Division and the Wildlife Service in the 1970s, before taking up his position with ICBP.

ICBP acts as a watchdog and guardian of the world's threatened bird species, and its activities include supporting about 100 conservation projects throughout the world, and providing information and advice on bird conservation to governments and decision-makers. ICBP regularly produces books and reports on global conservation issues, including the Bird Red Data Books. It also puts out a quarterly newsletter called *World Birdwatch*, which provides an international perspective on bird conservation issues in different countries.

The ICBP conference will be a mixture of workshops for various ICBP specialist groups, business meetings and symposia on issues such as conservation problems in the South Pacific, birds and tourism, conservation of biological diversity and management methods for threatened birds. Over 250 people from 50 countries have already registered for the ICBP conference.

Next in the line-up is the inaugural Pacific Festival of International Nature Films, to be held in Dunedin from 27 November to 1 December. The Festival will honour the work of natural history film makers from around the globe and will be a tribute to the splendours of the natural environment.

The next stopover on the migration route is Christchurch, where over 1,100 people from 52 countries will gather for the 20th International Ornithological Congress (IOC), from 2-9 December. The first ever IOC was held in Vienna in 1884, and since then the Congresses have provided an international forum for people involved in bird research. Each Congress is held in a different country, and is organised by a local Congress committee. Continuity between Congresses is provided by the "Committee of 100" – this committee of about 100 people is the International Ornithological Committee, and it has a permanent executive which includes Ben Bell, the Secretary-General of New Zealand's



One of the highlights of the International Ornithological Congress will be a special tour of subantarctic islands. Photo: Chris Robertson

Congress.

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand and the Royal Society of New Zealand began planning for the possibility of holding an IOC in New Zealand in the mid-1980s. New Zealand won its bid at Ottawa in 1986, despite strong competition from other contenders. Since then the organisers have been hard at work planning the Congress and a plethora of associated tours, and the scientific programme has been drawn up by an international scientific committee.

The scientific programme includes 48 symposia from 240 invited speakers, contributed papers, round-table discussions and poster presentations, as well as opportunities for bird watching in and around Christchurch. There will also be an opportunity to look in at Birdpex '90, an international stamp exhibition with birds as the theme, which will be running in Christchurch at the same time.

Timed to coincide with the IOC will be the reopening of Canterbury Museum's bird hall. The bird hall is being revamped as part of extensive renovations to the museum.

To cap it all off, and to provide our overseas visitors with a chance to see New Zealand, and of course our birds, there is also a range of tours available which will give people a chance to go bird spotting from Kaitia to Campbell Island. The highlight of the nature tours programme is a 13-day subantarctic cruise to our remote southern islands – and there is still an opportunity for Forest and Bird members to join in on this trip of a lifetime.

The World of Birds – A Southern Perspective is a uniquely kiwi approach to bird conservation and science. The close link between the ICBP conference and the IOC is a world first, and is a reflection of the strong ties between conservation and research in this country.

If you would like to find out more about the World of Birds, please contact Dr Ben Bell, World of Birds, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University, P O Box 600, Wellington.

Alison Ballance

Whale Listening

YOU'VE HEARD of whale watching around Kaikoura; soon researchers will start to listen in on sperm whales in order to gain new insights into their behaviour, which in turn will assist their conservation.

Steve Dawson and Liz Slooten, well known for their work with Hector's dolphin, plan to track sperm whales acoustically with the use of a directional hydrophone. Kaikoura is an ideal location for the work, being one of the few sites worldwide where mature male sperm whales can be studied near the shore.

Unlike other whales, sperm whales click almost continuously while underwater, the clicks being audible up to 10 km away. Thus the whales can be studied underwater. The clicks provide a number of clues about the whales: size, gender and behaviour can be

worked out from analyses of click "type" and click rate.

The novel research method should provide answers to such questions as: how many whales use Kaikoura waters, how are they distributed, how long do they stay in the area, how cohesive are their groups?

From a conservation point of view, the information will be useful in arguments over whale hunting. The International Whaling Commission moratorium on commercial whaling expires this year and member nations will again set catch limits. Because sperm whales found in New Zealand waters migrate from the Antarctic to tropical waters, any resumption of whaling outside New Zealand could affect local populations – and possibly the whale watching industry. 🐋

(Information from Cetos Research newsletter)