

## Godwits in the firing line

**T**HIS AUTUMN, Department of Conservation staff discovered that large numbers of godwits (kuaka) are being shot in far north harbours. The Department thinks a black market in godwits could be operating, with some birds being sold for food as far south as Auckland.

Harbours such as Rangaunu and Parengarenga are favoured godwit feeding areas and internationally important wintering sites for this long-legged arctic breeder. Each year godwits make an epic 20,000 km return journey to New Zealand from Siberia and Alaska to escape the northern hemisphere winter.

The birds are being shot and netted for food and many are left maimed. Department of Conservation staff estimated 3-4 percent of godwits in Rangaunu and Parengarenga were badly injured and many more seriously hurt birds were likely to have already been taken by predators. Department Scientist, Dr Ray Pierce, described the crippled survivors as a "horrendous" sight and he predicted many more would die. "These birds are likely to ditch into the ocean on their way back to Siberia and Alaska or not go at all."

More than godwits are being shot. Other

species they flock with, including the large far eastern curlew, are at risk.

Muriwhenua leader, Matiu Rata, wants Waitangi Tribunal support for the killing, which Forest and Bird strongly opposes. Harvesting godwits for food, as Mr Rata proposes, was necessary in the past, but in today's world it is an indulgence not a necessity.

Forest and Bird does not believe that the clock can be wound back. The eating of kakapo, godwits and kereru are an important part of Maori history, but it is not appropriate today. Our native bird populations have been severely depleted by habitat loss and predation. They deserve total protection.

Concern over depleted numbers of godwits because of indiscriminate shooting was the reason they were first protected in 1922 when harvesting was restricted to an open season between May and July. However, in 1941 godwits were specifically taken off the game list because of concerns about their continuing declining numbers. It would be a retrograde step to reintroduce hunting – the godwits have earned their right to grace our harbours in peace. 🐦

## Going green with Glaxo

**C**ORPORATE INVOLVEMENT in environmental and conservation projects is becoming increasingly common, and now staff at one Palmerston North company have started their own conservation group.

The Glaxo Conservation Group (GCG) was formed after a meeting of 10 Glaxo workers, although the group does not directly represent the company. Rather, it is a collection of individuals working to a common aim, aided by Glaxo which provides sponsorship for various projects.

These projects have included bringing a National Museum display on "The Forgotten Fauna" to the National Wildlife Centre at Mount Bruce, and encouraging local children to plant trees by helping schools to develop their own area of native reserve. The GCG hopes to continue school projects on a long-term basis. 🐦



Neill Velvin (GCG), Linda Stopforth (GCG) and Mike Thorsen, education officer with the National Wildlife Centre examining one of the "Forgotten Fauna" stars, a tuatara. Photo: Garry Norman

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