

fishing by Soviet vessels in the Southern Ocean.

Barry Weeber

Terns recovering after fishery closed

THE FUTURE of the arctic tern, and hundreds of thousands of other seabirds around Scotland, seems considerably brighter after the closure of the sandeel fishery around the Shetland Islands. Each breeding season since 1984, the 25-35,000 pairs of arctic terns on the islands have suffered catastrophic breeding failure. In 1980 the Shetlands had more than 40% of the British and Irish arctic tern population. In 1990 only two young were reared. It was feared that many Shetland seabird populations would soon become extinct with the virtual absence of successful breeding, and that the islands' lucrative \$NZ100-million nature-based tourism industry would be jeopardised. However, since the fishery was closed in mid-1990, seabird breeding has recovered spectacularly, with 30,000 tern chicks being raised in 1991.

Achieving closure of the fishery for the small eel-like fish, which are the staple diet of many Scottish seabirds, has been a hard-fought battle. Some scientists and fishery representatives argued that there was no link between

the commercial fishery and the huge decline in sandeel stocks (the fishery catches peaked at 52,000 tonnes in 1982 and had plummeted to 4,800 tonnes by 1988).

After considerable pressure from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Shetland Bird Club and the Scottish Wildlife Trust, who accused the British government of breaching an international agreement to give adequate protection to arctic tern breeding and feeding areas, the government agreed to take a precautionary approach and close the fishery.

And what are commercially caught sandeels used for? They are ground down to feed chickens and pigs, and caged salmon in marine fish farms.

Alan Tennyson

Japanese mist-net ban

AFTER PERSISTENT pressure from the Wild Bird Society of Japan and international environmental groups, the Japanese government banned the possession, sale or export of mist-nets from September last year.

Up to three million birds each year were caught in mist-nets for consumption in Japan. The use of mist-nets for anything other than scientific purposes has been illegal

since 1950, but the law proved largely ineffective, mainly because it did not make any attempt at all to control the sale or possession of the nets.

Moreover, the birds that are killed in Japan are just the tip of the iceberg. A large proportion of the millions of migratory birds that are killed in the Mediterranean each year are caught in mist-nets, almost all of which are imported from Japan. In Cyprus, for example, although mist-netting has been illegal for several years, the nets continue to be imported and more than ten million of the 25 million birds that are slaughtered each year in the country are believed to be netted.

In the long-term, the most effective way to halt the netting of birds is to remove demand for them. Japan currently imports frozen birds whose capture is prohibited within Japan. Conservationists are now pressing the government to ban this trade, which not only provides a market for other countries to supply, but also affords cover for poachers to operate within Japan.

Source: International Council for Bird Preservation

Reprieve for New South Wales forests

THE OLD-GROWTH eucalypt forests of New South Wales as well as the state's endangered wildlife have received a much-needed reprieve from logging.

A decision of the NSW Land and Environment Court in September was damning in its criticism of the Forestry Commission's logging practices which were found to contravene the wildlife protection provisions of the National Parks and Wildlife Act.

Environmentalists had brought an action in the court to stop logging and road construction in the Chaelundi State Forest, part of the Guy Fawkes wilderness in the north-east of the state, on the grounds that 23 endangered animal species known to inhabit the forest would be "disturbed or injured" by the Forestry Commission. The area has the highest-known concentration of arboreal mammals in New South Wales and was described by the court as a "veritable forest-dependent zoo".

In a state where the great bulk of logging is carried out in native forests, the commission claimed that the decision threatened "an imminent shut-down of all forestry activities" and appealed against the ruling. The appeal was lost and the commission has now called on the NSW Government to amend the National Parks and Wildlife Act to remove any restrictions on its logging operations.

The government, however, lacks an effective majority in the state parliament and in December was forced to accept an opposition-sponsored Endangered Species Bill which, to the great chagrin of the Forestry Commission, gives the National Parks and Wildlife Service the power to approve or refuse logging applications in state forests where endangered species might be killed or disturbed. The new legislation will expire, however, at the end of 1992 when a comprehensive review of the conflicts between forestry and conservation in native forests will have been completed. ♦



Forest and Bird is a member of the International Council for Bird Preservation and is the ICBP's delegate in the South Pacific.



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Although the arctic tern breeds in high northern latitudes it migrates south during the northern winter and is a rare visitor to New Zealand.