



# *In praise of North-west Nelson*

*The north-west corner of the South Island – less than 3 percent of New Zealand – is an area with an astonishing variety of rock types, soils, landforms and vegetation. This region of bewildering ecological complexity contains New Zealand's oldest rocks and half of our plant species including 50 that occur in no other part of the country. It is also the home of two-thirds of the world's species of giant land snails. Last June the New Zealand Conservation Authority set in train an investigation for the establishment of a national park in north-west Nelson. Peter Williams looks at why north-west Nelson has long been considered a natural region of exceptional importance.*

**T**HOUSANDS of square kilometres of coasts, valleys and mountains form the bulge at the north-west corner of the South Island, between the Tasman Sea, Golden Bay, and in the

south, the Buller River. The area is remote and sparsely populated with roads only at the margins.

Beginning at one corner of the area proposed for the national park, just inland from Karamea, lies the broad Oparara basin. Here, in an area encircled by hills

that prevent the outward flow of cold air, are some of the densest rimu stands in the South Island. Beneath the ground are archways and caves with fossil bird bones and the giant north-west Nelson cave spider.

In contrast, the Heaphy basin to the