



MARGARET PEACE

*Most of Rarotonga's high-altitude cloud forest will be included in a proposed nature reserve.*

## Rarotonga

MARGARET PEACE recently won a Forest and Bird competition for a holiday in Rarotonga. Here she reports on the island and its environment:

Rarotonga, only 65 square kilometres and with a population of 10,000, is the administrative centre and largest of the Cook Island group. The island was formed about two million years

ago when a large active volcano appeared out of the sea.

Most of the lowland vegetation consists of exotic species, some introduced in pre-European times, but the majority introduced since the late 18th century, both as food plants and as ornamentals. About two-thirds of the island is occupied by mountains, which are mainly covered with original tropical

forest, although invaded by many introduced species around the lower slopes. Some slopes were cleared of timber in the past and are now clothed with a dense growth of the scrambling fern (related to our umbrella fern). There are over 100 species of native flowering plants, of which ten are Polynesian endemics and 15 are unique to Rarotonga. There are also 88 species of ferns, of which four are endemic to the island.

In 1989 the Cook Islands Conservation Service proposed the establishment of the Te Manga Nature Reserve of some 118 hectares to protect most of the cloud forest above 400 metres. The Conservation Service is now indigenously staffed but the first director was Gerald McCormack, a New Zealand scientist who is still enthusiastically promoting the reserve.

Rarotonga's fauna has suffered worse than its flora from human

activity. The bird population has been sadly reduced by shooting and by rats and cats, as well as by the aggressive habits of the introduced Indian myna which is by far the most prevalent bird on the island.

## Corrections

THE PICTURE of a pair of brown kiwi in the last issue of the magazine (page 27) should have been attributed to John Lyall of DoC. The photo of Vancouver Island on the cover of the August 1991 issue was taken by Adrian Dorst. And the picture of the kereru on the September page in our 1992 *Natural Heritage* calendar should have been credited to Peter Reese.

Due to staff changeovers the article by John Hutcheson on *Insect Conservation* in the last issue was not cleared by him before publication. We apologise for the oversight. ♦

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