



KOKAKO RECOVERY

THE PLIGHT of the North Island kokako (*Callaeas cinerea wilsoni*) first received wide-spread attention in the late seventies when Rod Hay began his pioneering research sponsored by Forest and Bird. The results showed clearly that the main reasons for kokako decline (and the decline of other specialised endemic species) were loss of forest habitat through logging, and competition and predation from introduced mammals.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the protection of New Zealand's native forests was the main focus of conservation activity. As a bird dependent on the integrity of the forests the kokako became a symbol of this movement. The swing of public sentiment against logging, powerfully demonstrated by letter-writing campaigns and tree-top protests in the important kokako forest of Pureora, finally saw a reduction in the destruction of indigenous forests. When Crown-owned forests were transferred to the Department of Conservation in 1987, logging stopped on these lands. On private land a breakthrough was achieved in the Tasman Accord, in which Tasman

Forestry agreed to protect its native forests. This example from the largest forestry company paved the way for the New Zealand Forest Accord in 1991 negotiated between Forest and Bird and the forestry industry, so ending the era of wholesale native forest destruction for pine plantations.

But though the kokako's forests were largely saved, the birds continued to decline. The knotty problem remained of introduced mammals – the predatory rats, stoats and wild cats, and the possums, goats and deer which compete with the kokako for food and degrade its forest home. In 1985 help came from an unexpected quarter to the kokako forests of the King Country. Bovine tuberculosis had been spreading through the possum population in the western Taupo area towards the Waikato dairy herds, so the Ministry of Agriculture initiated a poisoning campaign to reduce possum numbers. Concerns about the possible effect of the 1080 poison on kokako resulted in a four-year programme which monitored kokako in Pureora forest during poison drops. During six poison operations only one of 83 kokako was reported missing, presumed poisoned. This small loss was

offset by the huge benefit to the kokako as their forest and food source recovered from the effects of possum browsing.

By the end of the 1980s it was evident that new advances in kokako management were needed, because on-going work was beginning to raise some crucial questions. Are kokako continuing to decline in the large forest tracts such as Puketi, Pureora, Mamaku Plateau and Te Urewera National Park? What are the exact effects of predators and browsers on kokako? Is management really helping kokako at all?

In June 1988 fifty people attended the Kokako Research and Management Workshop in Rotorua. The enthusiastic team of biologists, managers and conservationists discussed the most critical work needed to save kokako. A group of specialists was chosen to develop a recovery plan. Both the group and the plan evolved over the next few years, and the recovery plan was finally approved by the New Zealand Conservation Authority

*Female kokako with a chick in the nest in the ►
Coromandel Range. The chick's pink wattles
which develop a week after birth will turn
to lilac at fledging.*