



Hazel Speed, member of the recovery group, setting a stoat trap in Kaharoa forest. Stoats are a predator of kokako nests, but how significant they are in the decline in kokako numbers is one of the questions the recovery group wants to answer.



But what will happen to the other kokako populations scattered around the North Island? Without management, and even with management, they are probably doomed. Their best chance and most useful role may be if they are transferred to an offshore island, or taken into captivity.

A decade ago when logging was at its height in the Bay of Plenty, 34 birds were rescued before the forests were clearfelled and burnt. They were taken to Little Barrier Island where they have thrived, and today island-bred birds outnumber the immigrants.

Kapiti is the next most suitable island for kokako. This summer five birds from the west Waitomo forests were captured and taken to Kapiti. Over the next five years fifteen pairs will hopefully be established on the island.

The South Island kokako

IF THE NORTH ISLAND kokako has problems, they are nothing compared to those of the southern subspecies (*Callaeas cinerea cinerea*).

One hundred years ago this bird, which is mainly distinguished from its northern cousin by its orange rather than blue wattles, was abundant throughout the South Island. Facing the same pressures of predation and habitat modification as its northern counterpart the bird declined rapidly in numbers during this century and many scientists have considered it extinct for the last 30 years.

However, there have been enough unconfirmed sightings over that period from areas as widespread as Stewart Island, Nelson Lakes, north-west Nelson, Wakatipu Forest and Fiordland to keep alive the hope that this secretive bird survives in dense remote forests (see *Forest & Bird* May 1989).

A feather found on Stewart Island in 1987 is the best evidence to date that the southern kokako is holding on. It was confirmed only last year after microscopic analysis at the University of Amsterdam that the feather did indeed belong to the South Island kokako and that it had come from a recently living bird. The chances of survival of this subspecies, however, must be considered pretty slim while the threats of stoat predation and competition from browsers for food continue.