

Conservation update

Black stilt even more endangered

THE RECOVERY of the endangered black stilt population may be set back a number of years because of the critically low levels of Lakes Tekapo and Pukaki this winter.

The plight of the stilts has become extremely serious this winter as their feeding grounds on the edge of Lakes Tekapo and Pukaki have dried up. This was the case even before the Electricorp-sponsored bill, giving the SOE the right to lower Lake Pukaki another five metres, was rushed through Parliament in early July.

The black stilt is one of the world's rarest wading birds. It is endemic to New Zealand and its wild population stands at only 72.

Black stilts feed mainly on aquatic insects. Of the 39 birds that normally winter on the deltas of Pukaki and Tekapo many were forced by the poor food supply this year to move to other feeding areas. Most of these birds later turned up in the regular mid-winter count carried out by DoC in late July. It was clear from observations, however, that at Pukaki and Tekapo the birds were under stress and were finding food in short supply.



C.R. VEITCH/DOC

The black stilt has been in decline for most of this century, as a result of predation by introduced mammals and the loss of habitat. The only breeding population in the world is in the upper Waitaki basin.

Forest and Bird has been troubled by the Department of Conservation's inertia over the plight of the bird and its reluctance to argue against lowering of the lake below the agreed legal minimum.

This is in spite of the evidence presented by the department's own black stilt expert David Murray to the select committee inquiring into the Bill.

Mr Murray said that lowering Lake Pukaki could well cause a population decline in black stilts. He said there were six possible scenarios for the stilts following a lowering of the lake, and four of them would lead to a loss of birds.

He said that impacts may be evident in next year's breeding season if not in winter deaths.

Forest and Bird appeared before the select committee

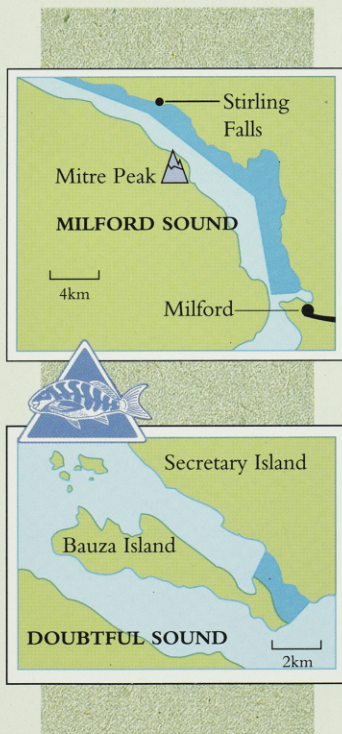
and strongly opposed the hastily-drafted legislation overriding the Resource Management Act to facilitate a further lowering of the lake.

The society's energy spokesperson, Keith Chapple, argued that Electricorp should conserve its way out of the national electricity shortfall rather than generating its way out, possibly at the expense of the black stilt.

New marine reserves

FIORDLAND and Coromandel will soon host new marine reserves, bringing the number of marine reserves in New Zealand waters to seven.

The two Fiordland reserves are a first in that they were formally proposed by the Federation of Commercial Fishermen and Fiordland fishing interests rather than a conservation body. The reserves are located on the northern side of Milford Sound (7.4 square kilometres), and an area (0.7 square kilometres) known as The Gut in Doubtful Sound. Both areas are rich in marine life such as the famous black corals and sea pens. Fiordland marine life lives largely in the



first 40 metres of water and, being so accessible, is at risk of serious over-exploitation. Neither reserve area was used by commercial fishers.

The gazettal of the first marine reserve on the Coromandel Peninsula is being held up by Fisheries Minister Doug Kidd. The proposed reserve, at Cathedral Cove off Hahei on the eastern side of the peninsula, was approved by Conservation Minister Denis Marshall in May.

This area of 9 square kilometres includes high-quality kelp forests, red algae, sponge gardens and sandflats with dense scallop populations. The reserve still requires the formal

approval of Mr Kidd. Commercial fishers and MAF are pressing for boundary changes to reduce the size of the reserve. Any such reduction would seriously weaken its ecological value.

The Kaikoura marine reserve nomination by Forest and Bird (see *Conservation News* February 1992) now awaits formal approval. The 2.3-square-kilometre area at the tip of Kaikoura Peninsula attracted 609 supporting submissions and 14 objections. Supporters included the local business community and local dive clubs while opposition has come from MAF and a few local lobster and paua fishers.