

*nunculus godleyanus* in the Hawdon Valley has also come under Mike's watchful eye with regular visits over the last four years.

Alarmed by the fact that no government agencies are currently monitoring any plant species in the central Southern Alps, Mike began keeping tabs on this palatable plant to reassure himself that it was not disappearing from the area because of browsing by chamois.

**A**S FOREST AND BIRD field officer his "patch" extends from Nelson and Marlborough south to Timaru and includes the West Coast. Sue Maturin, based in Dunedin, looks after Otago and Southland. Efficient use of time means much of Mike's work is Canterbury-based but he is available to

The Resource Management Act, with its increased emphasis on public participation in the planning process, is proving a burden as well as a blessing for both branch members and field staff. Regional and district councils and DoC are immersed in preparing regional policy statements, coastal plans, district plans and regional conservation management strategies. "Everyone wants or is required to have some environmental comment in what they are doing. You could spend all your time being a voluntary adviser to councils."

Mike believes regional and district councils will have to recognise that "if they want effective comment from groups they may have to provide some assistance. This could be in the form of travel expenses or a contribution towards costs."

pay greater attention to the demands tourism and recreation make on parks and other protected land and the threats of over-use and inappropriate use.

"I have a clear philosophy about what national parks are for, as do many Forest and Bird members. They are here to protect indigenous flora and fauna and natural cycles, not to provide a resource to get something more from. Yet a sector of the community, particularly people involved in tourism, have quite a different perception."

He predicts that if the practical implications of the three-fold increase in overseas visitors are not anticipated and some bottom lines set, New Zealand will become a "has been" on the tourist circuit. With our national parks compromised by over-crowded tracks, gondolas, hotels, condominiums and similar "developments" the visitors will head off for Antarctica – "the last frontier".

A field officer's position is not one for popularity seekers. The job often brings the incumbent into conflict with staff in government agencies at the local, regional and national level, whether it's publicising a district council's failure to act against a ski field developer bulldozing ski runs without the necessary resource consents, or highlighting DoC's tardiness in moving on areas recommended for protection under the PNA programme.

"You have to be diplomatic because you are confronting people all the time, asking why are you doing this, saying they should be doing that, or we believe these things are important."

Good organisational and writing skills are useful, as is the old-fashioned virtue of thrift when working for a non-government organisation with limited resources. In the Christchurch office this extends to conscience pangs when note pads recently replaced odd scraps of paper for taking telephone messages.

As traffic slicks by on the wet tarmac outside, the fax shrills and another press release reaches its target, the city seems only a temporary abode for Mike Harding. Before long the mountains are likely to reclaim this student of nature's mysteries. ♦



EUGENIE SAGE

"You could work 80 hours a week and still not get the job done."

assist other branches when help is requested as in the Kaikoura marine reserve campaign.

He says the position involves a "real juggling game" – responding to members' requests, keeping Forest and Bird's public profile high, representing the society at numerous local government and central agency meetings and working on national campaigns such as the review of the marine mammal sanctuary for Hector's dolphin. "You could work 80 hours a week and still not get the job done."

Scheduling time for field work is essential he says. "You cannot be an office-based environmentalist and maintain your credibility forever. You've got to get out and establish the conservation values of an area, look at the specific elements, and take some photographs to show others."

He says he is motivated to put in the hours needed to keep all the balls in the air by the lasting rewards of seeing areas set aside for protection through his and others' efforts. "What really fires me up is the threats to protected areas and most of them are unnecessary threats – things done for expedience or greed rather than survival."

Grazing in national parks is a particular dislike. "We don't need to do it. The economic returns are infinitesimal yet it has enormous impacts on the forest fringes and on the tussock communities."

Tourism in national parks provides more dollars but also has a downside. The New Zealand Tourism Board is seeking to increase overseas visitors to three million annually by the end of the decade. Mike foresees conservationists having to



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