

The Pacific oysters are a boon to oyster farmers who can restock their beds for free, but conservation agencies are concerned at the impact they will have on native species.

Source: *New Scientist*

## Mixed prospects for kagu

THE FIRST extensive listening survey of the endangered New Caledonian kagu has thrown up some good – and bad – news.

The good news is that there are more of the flightless

position (nine times the haemoglobin but a third of the red blood cells of other birds) making it an ornithological oddity.

The survey was the first phase of a four-year Kagu Recovery Project which is supported by DoC and Massey University in New Zealand, and the RSPB in Britain. The next stage of the project involves a research and education campaign. Finally it is hoped to establish reserves in key kagu areas and to manage them to control introduced animals.

In addition, a successful captive breeding programme in

The volume of oil travelling the oceans has doubled since 1985 to 1.5 billion tonnes a year and, inevitably, big spills are becoming more frequent. Yet it is only the major ones which reach the headlines. Numerous smaller incidents go unreported.

Because a glut of tankers came on the market in the 1970s, more than half the world's fleet is more than 15 years old – the age when a ship is generally nearing the end of its working life. Many are registered in countries such as Liberia and Bermuda where the controls and checks on

Improved crew training, avoidance of narrow shipping routes plus the earlier enforcement of safer designs are all essential. Otherwise the effects on the world's wildlife will continue unabated.

## Holes in new ozone decision

IN THE aftermath of the largest Antarctic ozone hole on record, the meeting of the world's environment ministers in Copenhagen last November tightened the deadlines for the phasing out of ozone depleting substances. They refused, however, to take decisive action against new threats to the ozone layer.

The Montreal Protocol signatories brought forward the phase-out date of CFCs and carbon tetrachloride by four years to 1996, and halons by six years to 1994.

HCFCs, touted as CFC substitutes until their own considerable ozone depletion potential was realised, have now been brought into the Montreal protocol but, disappointingly, will not be phased out till 2030.

While these changes passed with little debate, there was wrangling over the "new" threat of methyl bromide. Production of this fumigant increased 50 percent from 1984 to 1990 due to the growing international trade in fruit and vegetables, and it is now thought to be responsible for up to ten percent of the ozone destroyed to date.

Scientific meetings preparatory to Copenhagen concluded that most uses of methyl bromide could be replaced with other chemical fumigants within this decade. However, major fruit exporters such as Israel, Brazil, Spain, Greece and Italy, which depend on methyl bromide as a cheap pest control, refused to accept any cutbacks in use and the only agreement was to freeze production and consumption (apart from quarantine uses) at 1991 levels from 1995.



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*The flightless kagu has no natural predators and little means of defence against introduced ones apart from a spectacular distraction display. Its grey-white appearance and reclusive behaviour have led to Melaneseans referring to the bird as "the ghost of the forest".*

ground-nesting bird than were thought – an estimated 500. The worrying results, however, are that kagu habitat is very fragmented and only five percent of birds are in areas protected from mining and forestry. Kagu are most vulnerable when forests are opened up for these activities. Roads provide access to introduced predators such as cats, and also to hunters and their dogs.

The kagu is allied to the cranes and rails but with no known close relatives. About the size of a domestic hen, it feeds on invertebrates on the forest floor. It has a unique nasal structure and blood com-

position, the Rivière Bleue Park, south-east of Noumea, has provided birds for reintroduction to other areas.

## Stopping the oil spillage

DESPITE THE continuing run of oil tanker disasters – the breakup of the *Braer* on the Shetland Islands in early January was one of the worst in history, spilling more than twice the amount of oil as the *Exxon Valdez* in 1989 – there seems little international will to regulate tanker traffic or enforce improvements in procedures or technology.

vessel safety are weak to non-existent.

A decision in 1991 by the International Maritime Organisation (a UN agency) that all larger tankers must have double hulls or equivalent safety devices to decrease the chances of spillage in the event of an accident, is meant to take effect this year. However there is a two to three year backlog of orders in the world's shipyards to be met, as owners try to beat the deadline. Thus these old-style ships will still be being launched onto the world's oceans in two years time and will still be transporting oil in 20 years.