

Seventy years a' growing

AFTER 70 YEARS, the need for our society to protect New Zealand's "forests and birds" has not abated, only changed. Indeed some battles, like the campaign to protect the kauri in a national park, go back for most of our existence.

But no conservation battle, it seems, is ever wholly won. The world changes and so do people's values. When Forest and Bird joined with local Maori to effect the statutory protection of godwit in 1941 how many could imagine that more than 50 years later another generation would want to harvest them? Or consider the native pigeon, now more endangered than when it was first absolutely protected in 1921; who might have foreseen it today, becoming a symbol in the political aspirations of some Maori to manage and harvest the forests again?

Forest and Bird was born in response to the excesses of pioneer development. Our philosophy of nature protection emerged from a growing concern that natural New Zealand was rapidly disappearing. Since then the society has played a key role in the establishment of national parks and reserves to protect species and their habitats. That campaigning spirit continues as the public estate languishes in an era of mean spirits and casual compromise.

In places the very fabric of the parks is threatened. Officers of the Department of Conservation speak of losing the bush from some reserves within 25 years, through pests like possums, yet there is only enough money dedicated to eradicate possums from one percent of the land in their care. There are local communities, some Maori and some European, who argue for the return of parks to them for the purposes of development. Business and local governments continue to eye the possibility of getting "something for nothing" from the conservation estate.

Presently, several factors of social change are affecting our work for nature protection, in ways unimaginable a few years ago. Hard times have meant not only limited funding for the protection of national parks and reserves but also the need for employment has meant new pressures to develop resources previously protected. Further, continuing Maori grievances have placed the very ownership of previously secure land, plants and wildlife in debate.

Forest and Bird members, like most reasonable New Zealanders, must wish the questions raised by Maori over the ownership of land and living creatures on it, to be promptly and fairly resolved. In righting the wrongs of the past, however, the collective achievements of the broader community in protecting our plants and wildlife should not be lost sight of.

In the late twentieth century, caring for nature has become part of a worldwide concern for the very survival of life in an overpopulated world. Our environmental concerns are but a microcosm of a universal need to act for the protection of the environment: from pollution, atmospheric change, even sheer exhaustion of the natural world on which people ultimately depend for their physical survival. We cannot afford to lose ourselves now in some historical romance, looking back to a lost world where there may once have been enough birds and forests for all to harvest, without endangering the health of the planet.

Gordon Ell

National President

COVER The kereru or native pigeon is one of New Zealand's best known birds. But throughout the country it is in trouble, particularly in Northland where illegal hunting is adding to the threats posed by cats, stoats and rats (see story page 18).



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