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REISCHEK'S PARAKEET is one of eight subspecies (two of which are now extinct) of the red-crowned parakeet which have evolved to live in the varied habitats of different Pacific Ocean islands. This subspecies is found only in the subantarctic Antipodes Islands and has slightly yellower plumage than its mainland relative.

New Zealand has produced its own special suite of plants and animals. This is only one instance of how the isolation of islands results in the evolution of weird, wonderful and different organisms. TIM HIGHAM reports on how making a documentary on the Pacific Islands gave one film maker new insights into the evolution of life in this country.

WORKING on *Islands*, TVNZ's recent two-part documentary on the natural history of the Pacific, changed director-producer Rod Morris's perception of New Zealand. The animals and plants he observed resulting from other islands' isolation helped him appreciate the kind of powerful evolutionary forces that shaped New Zealand's own fauna and flora.

"Those forces are ghosts – long gone – and we have to recognise them through clues that are remote, rare and difficult to access," he says.

Two years' researching and filming *Islands* gave Morris a unique and privileged overview into natural history and evolution in the Pacific.

The former Wildlife Service officer and co-author of *Wild South: Saving New Zealand's Endangered Birds*, has plans to work on another popular book based on his *Islands* insights. "I just need a bit more of a handle on how our things fit together – the fish, insects, amphibians and reptiles; not just the rare birds."

Morris says some of the jigsaw pieces are starting to be put in place. It is argued by many scientists, for example, that New Zealand's many divaricating plants are an evolutionary response to moa browsing. A springy bush with its small leaves hidden inside a maze of fibrous stems offers resistance and little sustenance to large, strong-beaked, browsing birds. Some