

Their new attitude toward the native bush that was fast disappearing from the hills was well expressed by W.P. Reeves' widely-quoted poem "The Passing of the Forest", written in 1898, with its closing lament:

"...Is this the price we pay –  
The price for progress – beauty swept  
away?"

Such sentiments were voiced at this time even in Parliament. Legislation established national parks at Tongariro in 1894 and Taranaki in 1900, and in 1903 a Scenery Preservation Act was passed to provide for the reservation of other areas of particular scenic or natural beauty. There were limits, of course: land suitable for farming was not to be set aside, since, as the new Scenery Preservation Board put it, "the needs of settlement are imperative".

At the same time there were signs of a new, patriotic feeling for the native birds. In 1907 the natural history writer James Drummond declared that "the bell-bird's song is even more bewitching to a New Zealander than the lark's song is to an Englishman. The notes go straight to a New Zealander's heart."

Some moves had been made even in the nineteenth century to protect or preserve native birds. To begin with it had been more a matter of regulating the hunting of particular species, by special provisions under the game laws.

The tui was an early sentimental favourite, and was given some protection in this way in 1873, followed by white heron and crested grebe in 1885. In 1892 huia was added to the protected list (at the request of both Ngati Huia of Otaki and the Governor, Lord Onslow), followed in 1896 by bellbird, kokako, kakapo, kiwi, saddleback, stitchbird (and tuatara). Kereru had been on and off the protected list for some years. But this statutory protection was not very effective. The very rarity of species such as huia made them sought-after as museum or drawing-room specimens, and the "collectors" who shot birds for this trade paid little heed to legal restraints.



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THE NEXT approach to bird protection was to establish island reserves as arks of refuge for native species, where it was hoped they would be isolated from the introduced competitors, predators (especially the recently introduced and already widely detested stoats and weasels) and all the other effects of civilisation and progress on the mainland. Resolution Island was reserved for this purpose in 1891, Little Barrier Island in 1895 and Kapiti in 1897,

and efforts were made to try to transfer birds such as huia, kiwi and kakapo to them.

Kapiti Island attracted particular attention. It still retained a certain mystique from its connection with the Maori warrior leader, Te Rauparaha, and it was also the most visible and accessible of the island reserves – and the nearest to the politicians in Wellington. In 1914 the state of the Kapiti Island reserve became a matter of public controversy. The northern

end of the island was still farmed by the Maori owners, but there was no proper boundary fence. The critics charged that the reserve was overrun with sheep and goats, destroying the very plants and animals it was intended to preserve.

Among these critics in 1914 were E.V. (Val) Sanderson, and a new conservationist pressure group, named the New Zealand Forest and Bird Protection Society. This organisation had little if any connection with our present society. It