

helpers, Mike has systematically worked his way through Pakatoa, Rotoroa and Rakino Islands, laying grids of poison bait to eliminate rats. While the first two have been declared resounding successes, the Rakino programme failed. Mike is confident of achieving success with a tighter grid, and once this has been done, he can claim credit for the second largest rat-free area in the country.

Mike views introduced predators as the key obstacle to restoring New Zealand's forest ecology. "Pest suppression is a responsibility and challenge which public agencies must pick up," he says. "While the initial costs will be high, if carried out routinely it will become accepted as something which simply has to be done, just like mowing lawns."

Pioneering work by ARC rangers and DoC staff at Wenderholm Regional Park near Waiwera, targetting ship rats in a poisoning programme, has just enabled kereru to breed successfully for the first time in five years of monitoring. An inte-



Mike Lee persuading the Auckland Regional Council to reverse its policy and oppose sludge dumping in the Hauraki Gulf. Fellow Alliance councillor and close friend Bruce Jesson is on his left.

grated conservation ecology approach to park lands is Mike's management style, and one which he hopes will be taken up right round the country.

Alarmed at the recent precipitous decline in kokako numbers, particularly on Great Barrier where a concerted search this summer confirmed the presence of just two birds, his immediate aim is to preserve kokako habitat by purchasing the 500-hectare Cashmore Block in the northern Hunua Range south-east of Auckland. Hunua kokako are the most important population in northern New Zealand.

To do this he'll be taking a leaf out of DoC's book, imitating the heavy-duty pest suppression programme they carried out at Mapara in the King Country. Mike hopes that by establishing a predator-proof protective ring around the forest where the kokako live, the birds will have a mainland sanctuary in which they can hold their own. He refers to them affectionately as New Zealand's oldest citizens, who, having managed to survive the huge upheavals colonisation has brought to their home environment in the last 150 years, must not be allowed to go extinct in our lifetime.

Other blocks targetted by Lee are some 370 hectares in the northern Waitakeres, and the 300-hectare Whakanewha Block on Waiheke – "the largest possum-free wilderness within 50 km of Auckland".

TALKING TO HIM, the twin passions of politics and conservation shine out in equal balance.

Nowhere was this more apparent than in the very public stance Lee took on the highly contentious issue of the dumping of 270,000 cubic metres of harbour dredgings in the Hauraki Gulf a year ago.

Lee counts as his single most satisfying conservation victory persuading the ARC to reverse its policy on Hauraki sludge dumping. "This was the majesty of democracy in action," he says. "Seeing the last regional council, many of whom were

from an older generation, bowing to the weight of popular opinion and giving the people of

*Iti te kopara kai tarere ana i te puihi
o te kahika
Small though the bellbird may be it
swings on the topmost twigs of the
white pine.*

Auckland a farewell gift – a ban on dumping. It's holding, but only just. The public must continue to demonstrate their support for the ban; otherwise bureaucratic resistance and powerful vested interests will cause it to be eroded."

In the meantime Mike feels honoured to be in a position where he can help build a better future – and he's really looking forward to the day when once more the song of the korimako will echo across the Waitakeres. ♦



Jacqui Barrington is Forest and Bird's northern field officer. She previously worked for Greenpeace.



At the peak of the protests over sludge dumping last August, Mike Lee boarded the dredge and handcuffed himself to the winching gear to protest the abuse of the proposed gulf marine park as a waste dump. The direct action interrupted the dumping for some thirty minutes before he was cut free by police.