



Forest streams cascading over moss-covered rocks – a typical feature of the rainforest in the west of Waitutu bordering Fiordland.

“... here lies the greatest stretch of indigenous lowland forest in New Zealand that has been least directly affected by man’s activities, a forest wilderness that is fascinatingly varied, contained within a splendid setting of mountains, superbly beautiful lakes and a rugged sea coast.”

J.L. NICHOLLS, 1976

WOKE UP to the loud, melodic song of a kaka in a nearby tree. Sights and sounds of kaka in the high canopy throughout the day. At nightfall, a morepork above our campsite.”

So reads the journal entry from one of our excursions into the Waitutu Forest.

Waitutu is the largest remaining relatively unchanged lowland forest in New Zealand.

It is not entirely pristine; the southeast corner has been logged, the understorey has been subject to deer and pigs, and rats and stoats kill native wildlife. But possum numbers are still relatively low and the forest retains a wealth of native birdlife,

particularly rare species such as kaka, yellowhead, yellow-crowned parakeet and robin. With its many southern rata, mistletoe, fuchsia and podocarps, including stands of almost pure rimu, the forest provides a rich food source for these and other birds such as bellbirds, tui and tomtits.

It’s the birds that stay in your mind, in particular their abundance. Kaka, more common in Waitutu than anywhere else on the mainland, seem ever-present. In the mornings and evenings their calls merge with the those of kea from nearby ridges, as if kaka and kea were engaged in some vocal duel. In winter it is the heavy wingbeat of kereru, or the common sight of tui – up to seven in a single tree – that

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Mixed silver beech and podocarp forest. As you travel inland, the proportion of beech increases. This group of moss-covered silver beech trees stands in the broad valley of the lower Wairaurahiri River – New Zealand’s longest lowland river left in its natural state.