



Magpie troubles

In your August magazine I was drawn to the article on magpies. We had a dreadful problem with them and although shooting is one option they are exceedingly cunning and just seem to sense when you have gone to get a gun. The viciousness with which they attack native birds is saddening. In our area, tui are starting to make a comeback but only last week one was found dead following a magpie attack.

Hopefully the installation of a trap in the area will make a difference.

Thank you very much for a wonderfully encouraging article.

Alex Dempster
Pauatahanui

Soft on cats?

The Dog Control Act 1996 passed without a fall of government despite a provision that a dog causing death of any protected wildlife renders the dog owner liable for a fine or prison.

It may be that the passage of the Bill was helped by dogs frequently getting a bad press. Less publicity is given to infected cat bites, toxoplasmosis, worms, fouled gardens and other objectionable aspects of cats. It may be that before trying to get legislation controlling cats introduced, people with the welfare of wildlife at heart may help by being more forthright about the damage done by cats. A few bitten, clawed, cat scratched legs could well join the dog bites on television.

Why must the "acknowledged social role for the companion cat" (Ken Catt, May issue) continue unchallenged? The argument that cats must be exonerated because they cannot be trained suggests cats are

unsuitable animals as domestic pets rather than that they should free of legal restraint.

Jacqui Barrington ("Boaties and Island Sanctuaries") in the August issue points out that both cats and dogs are carried on boats. Boat owners do, of course, take their cats ashore. A dog on the loose at Tiri or Kawau is far more visible than a cat. There is more chance of the dog being retrieved by the owner or picked up and impounded. The large feral cat population on Kawau makes a straying domestic cat less noticeable. A stray dog would be noticed by residents. Why did the article exclude the danger presented by domestic cats?

Not long ago felling forests to clear the land for farming was an accepted form of social behaviour. It no longer is. I suggest more publicity about many aspects of cats could reduce the unquestioning social acceptance of them.

People seem more timid about criticising cats than criticising dogs. Perhaps this is the first social attitude that needs changing.

Constance Macnamara
Hamner Springs

Vanishing pukeko?

In the Taranaki area some of our



local members are worried about the fate of pukeko.

We have recently discovered that these native birds are on the list of game that may be shot during the shooting season, at the rate of up to ten each day.

Although there seem to be many still around and thriving, we have no idea of what actual population levels are in the

whole of New Zealand or even in Taranaki. Is it possible that the pukeko is in danger?

Many of their swamp environments are being drained and this is also possibly a threat to their continued existence.

Can some other readers help us with this worry?

Sandra Lawrence
Hawera

Conservation director Kevin Smith responds:

Pukeko are one of four native birds on the game bird list (the others are paradise duck, grey duck and shoveller). The management of these birds is the responsibility of the Fish and Game Council.

Little monitoring of wild population sizes for these species is undertaken by Fish and Game and none by DoC. Anecdotal evidence from good bird observers reports declines in grey duck (far easier to shoot than mallards) and shoveller. I have seen little

information on pukeko population trends but the inclusion of pukeko on the game list has long been controversial with pukeko fans especially as the dead birds are not eaten but just thrown away.

Pukeko impacts on pastures – often overstated – are cited as a reason for them being on the game list.

Like Sandra, I would be interested in members' observations on pukeko population trends in their areas and in members' views as to the appropriateness of pukeko being on the game list.

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