

fair go for the kiwi

I commend an article in this edition by Dr Hugh Robertson, one of New Zealand's leading ornithologists, and the scientific leader of the Kiwi Recovery Programme, sponsored by the Bank of New Zealand. In a concise compass, he discusses the issues confronting our national bird.

At the present rate of decline, 12 kiwi die every day. Since the launching of Forest and Bird's Kiwis for Kiwis campaign last September, around 3000 kiwi have died — about four percent of the surviving population on the mainland. They've been killed by ferrets, stoats, dogs, cats, traps, poison; a few have been run over by vehicles. The carnage continues everywhere because the agents of decline are everywhere.

Hugh Robertson tells us that about 200 kiwi once lived in a reserve near Tangiteroria, in Northland. Ferrets appeared in 1987. Six years later the kiwi population crashed to 30 birds. Yet ferrets are bought, sold, pampered and flaunted as a modern designer pet.

What foolishness is this? Surely, the threat posed by these imported serial kiwi-killers is well understood? Parliament should ban and be damned. The sale, distribution and private ownership of ferrets should be banned, if for no other reason than it sends a clear message — even though ferrets are already here, they're not wanted.

The popular image of New Zealand is of magnificent scenery, wonderful nature walks, exciting rivers, pristine mountains, clean air, healthy outdoor pursuits and splendid rain forests. But the forests are empty, the birds all but gone. In her foreword to the Draft Biodiversity Strategy, the Prime Minister, Mrs Shipley, acknowledges this. Since New Zealand was first settled our unique plants and animals have been in retreat, driven back by burgeoning pests and destruction of habitat. And, she says ... 'we are keen for all New Zealanders to get involved and become champions of biodiversity...we must act now'.

Fine sentiments. There can be no question that they are well intentioned. But, as the proverb says, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. What sense are we to make of a Government that acknowledges the importance of saving natural habitats and ecosystems, yet gives conditional approval for Timberlands, (a company it owns), to destroy natural habitats and ecosystems?

The kiwi epitomises the dramatic decline and fall of natural New Zealand. Forest and Bird embarked on this keynote campaign because (as Hugh Robertson says) 'the kiwi is a good indicator of environmental health'. If we cannot save our national bird, what hope is there

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for the other plants and animals, or indeed the people of New Zealand.

Whilst recognising there are fiscal limitations and other constraints, Forest and Bird has developed a realistic proposal that provides a range of representative areas. We have proposed establishing 11 'kiwi zones' of 10-20,000 hectares each, at a cost of \$1 million per zone per year for 10 years. If these kiwi zones are established and managed accordingly, Forest and Bird is satisfied the future of the kiwi will be improved.

Of its own, the Kiwi Recovery Programme will not ensure the survival of the mainland kiwi. Neither should we expect it to do so; the programme was always intended as a means toward an end, not an end in itself. As Dr Robertson says, the aims of the programme were to find out the kiwi's distribution and genetic variation, its threats, and start to manage the recovery of the most endangered populations.

Operation Nest Egg has unearthed some valuable conservation management tools. But again, we should not expect more than is reasonable from this very successful project. It's time to move on.

The kiwi may be clawing its way back, but only in those quite small areas actively managed as part of the kiwi recovery programme. Around the rest of the country the kiwi is in desperate straits and will continue to be so until such time as the lessons learned these past seven years are put into practice in the field. Hugh Robertson correctly identifies changes to legislation and public attitudes as important issues to be addressed. The bottle-neck, however, is in Parliament and the funds it authorizes for conservation management. Adequate re-



sources and funds can make a difference.

So my fellow kiwi, how about giving the kiwi a fair go?

— Keith Chapple

KEITH CHAPPLE is national president of Forest and Bird.





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