

## Painting a millennium of loss

**W**ildlife painter and author Ronald Cometti took three months to do the striking painting of New Zealand's extinct birds which makes up the centrefold of this magazine (pages 24-25). Since people settled New Zealand about 1000 years ago New Zealand has lost 43 species of birds, 32 of them in Maori times and a further 11 since European settlement. On top of that, land development and drainage has destroyed so much of the native habitat that many further species are threatened, rare or endangered.

'The painting is really a warning against losing any more of our threatened and endangered birds – a challenge for the next millennium,' Ronald Cometti says.

It follows another about forest birds, which he previously published as a poster.

'I spent a couple of years thinking how to go about painting the "missing" birds, working out how they might go together,' the artist says. 'Then, for three months, I researched and painted the individual birds.'

A lot of the work was done from museum specimens and photographs of skeletons in W.R.B Oliver's 1930s work *New Zealand Birds*.

'I know a moa was supposed to have carried its neck bent but I have drawn these species to full height because they obviously used the neck to reach up high

to browse, and their full height is demonstrated this way,' says Ronald Cometti. 'Things like the stance of these birds, their height, and the weight of their legs was very important to me.'

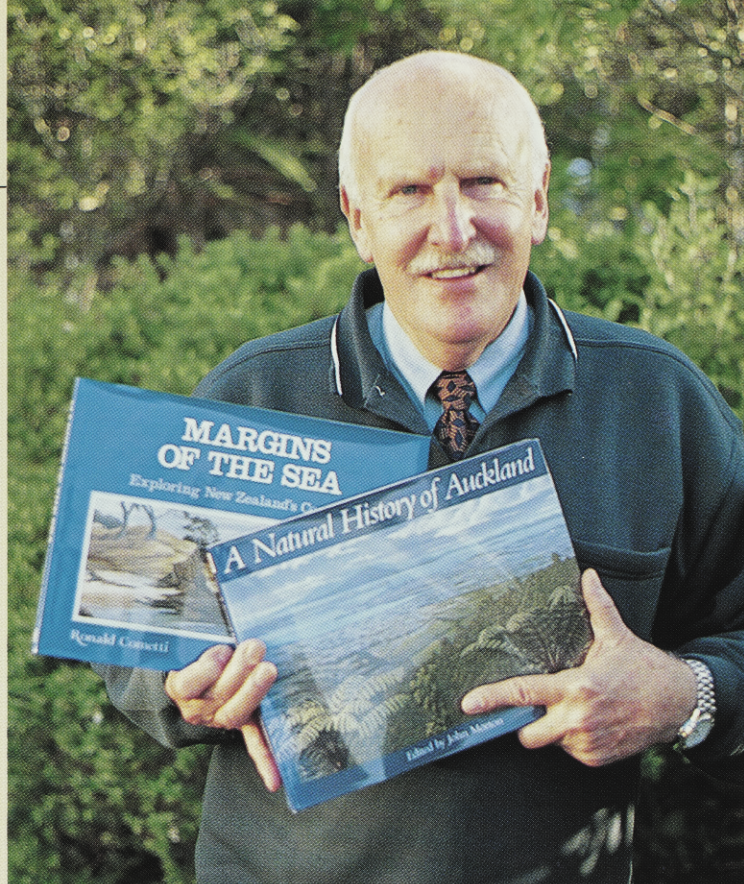
As for the colours, Ron Cometti smiles and says, 'They're mainly pigments of my imagination.'

'There's not much available to tell what the correct plumage should be, and the only surviving feathers from the Maori period are from moa. All round the world other large flightless birds have cryptically coloured young, so I made my moa chick match the striped colors of other ratites such as the emu, the rhea and the ostrich.'

'I've tried to paint the moa with fine feathers, more like the kiwi than the horsehair models in some museums. They would have needed feathers like that to make their way along the bush trails which feeding birds made before the invasion of people.'

He also took inspiration from similar-looking types of bird. For example: 'I borrowed the lovely blue-and-grey plumage of the kagu of New Caledonia, because there is a superficial resemblance, though the two may not be related.'

'Promoting an interest in the better conservation of our native species is what inspires me to specialise in painting our wildlife,' he says.



GORDON ELL, BUSH FILMS

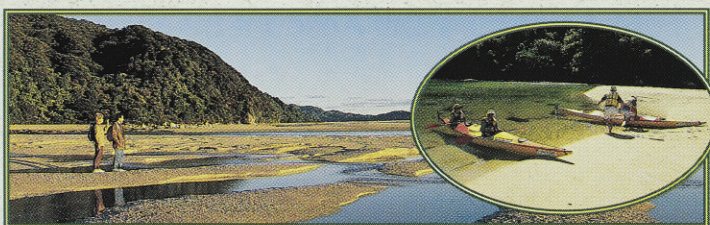
Ronald Cometti, who painted New Zealand's extinct birds in this issue of *Forest & Bird*, has been a full-time wildlife painter and author for the past 20 years. Previously he was a freelance illustrator in advertising. He sells his paintings through galleries, or by commission. His published work includes a book on Little Barrier, where he worked as a volunteer during the 1980s, and illustrations for *Margins of the Sea* and *The Natural History of Auckland*, both projects of Prof. John Morton, a distinguished life member of *Forest and Bird*.

### The Wellington Regional Council adopts a politically sensitive approach to pest destruction.



GORDON ELL, BUSH FILMS

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## Environmentally Friendly Packaging

**P**ackaging and printing inks are current concerns for the environmental-labelling scheme, Environmental Choice. The Government-initiated body draws up specifications for environmentally sensitive products, to encourage their production and widen consumer choice.

In the packaging field, Environmental Choice labels have been recently awarded to

Premium Packaging Ltd of Tamaki for two ranges of 'thermo-fibre' egg cartons made from 100-percent recycled paper.

At the same time, Environmental Choice has issued an environmental-labelling specification for printing inks. Manufacturers have thereby been challenged to produce inks and processes which 'go easier on the earth'. —  
Source: Melissa Arseneault.