

A CENTURY AGO the government acquired most of Kapiti. The Crown wished to provide an ark for rare birds – or did it? This book explains, for the first time, that politicians of the day also wanted to prevent a local entrepreneur from gaining control of the island.

Initially the island was neglected while various government departments vied to use it as a farm, a game reserve or even a leper colony. It was some time before it began to function as a bird sanctuary. During the 1920s and 1930s, the northern end became famous as an informal resort.

Since the 1960s, the sanctuary has taken over almost all of Kapiti, attracting more visitors as interest in the environment has grown. At the same time, the last of the noxious animals have been removed – possums in the 1980s, rats in the 1990s.

Today Kapiti is poised on the brink of an exciting new era. Realising its potential will, however, depend on co-operation between the island's managers, local iwi and the residents of the Kapiti Coast. To achieve this, a greater understanding of the island's history is needed.

KAPITI is of a similar format to the author's well-known book TARARUA. With a hard cover, its more than 300 (A4 size) pages are lavishly illustrated with 280 maps, paintings and photographs – most in colour.

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## The high costs of pests & weeds

he real costs to New Zealand of pests and weeds have at last been quantified in terms the politicians (and the nation) can understand. A commendable report from the Government's advisory body, the Conservation Authority, puts the total cost at in excess of \$840 million a year, or about one percent of New Zealand's gross domestic product.

The report breaks new ground with its economic analysis: it's both scholarly and accessible, and a very useful tool in the fight for better conservation.

The report doesn't stop with identifying the problems. Entitled *Pests and Weeds: A Blueprint for Action*, it goes on to detail a whole raft of possible measures for arresting and, where possible, repairing the present situation. It reviews the historic invasion of New Zealand by pests and weeds and identifies how their spread might have been prevented. It also makes suggestions for measures which could make our border controls more effective, while recognizing the current push for even freer trade. And it reveals the likely additional costs of doing nothing.

One of the most frightening messages is the need to protect our borders not only against the more obvious pests and weeds, but also the pathogens which spread disease in plants and animals, including human beings.

In all, the report suggests more than 40 ways in which New Zealand should improve its controls and protect itself against the alien invaders. These include better biosecurity and preparedness for such emergencies as the recent invasion of tussock moths. It also suggests sanitary procedures to protect our offshore islands from further invasions, and regulations to stop overseas ships introducing weed species to our waters through their ballast tanks.

Some of the recommendations are so simple and comparatively inexpensive that it is hard to imagine why they are not already in place: for example, requiring importers to clean up second-hand vehicles before letting them into New Zealand. The report is full of topical examples of avoidable importations. It is also rich in ideas to put things right.

While levels of funding in the war against pests and weeds need to be increased, there is an economic benefit from this spending. Besides preventing the preventable invasions, better pest and weed control will help



preserve the intangible base of an healthy environment, and put some meaning back into the popular belief in a 'clean, green, New Zealand'.

The Pests and Weeds document (to which Forest and Bird made a contribution through its membership of the drafting committee) goes well beyond the usual concerns about what pests and weeds are doing to the conservation estate, though this is important. Conservation is only one of the sectors which are suffering from the invasion of foreign species. It puts a price on what these organisms are costing our industries too: identifying risks to agriculture, horticulture, forestry, tourism and the marine environment. There are also potential dangers in the fields of human health when creatures which can carry debilitating diseases, such as dengue fever and Japanese encephalitis, are accidentally introduced into New Zealand.

Here, for the first time, there is an analysis of what pests and weeds actually cost us in terms of economic losses and the costs of control. The economic analysis by Dr Geoff Bertram of Victoria University estimates that the New Zealand economy loses around \$440 million a year due to existing levels of animal pests, weeds and pathogens. On top of this, the private and public sectors spend around \$400 million annually to prevent an increase in the level of infestation. It is the sum of these two figures, plus 'intangibles' such as the cost of pest damage to the conservation estate, that puts the costs close to one percent of gross domestic product.

While scholarly, the report is written for the general reader (by Kevin Hackwell). It shows that with our present knowledge, legislation and money could be used more effectively in the war against pests and weeds.

The recommendations should be required reading for those who prepare the nation's



budgets, and all those who are in a position to help reverse the damage that pests, weeds and pathogens can do.

KEITH CHAPPLE is national president of Forest and Bird.