

mailbag

Genetic Engineering

As with all organisations, it is important for Forest and Bird to remain focused on what we are trying to achieve — the well-defined set of objectives published on the contents page of our magazine.

It is disturbing that a number of individuals try to use the Forest and Bird platform to promote their own personal views on matters that do not fall within that focus. In particular, I refer to the contentious issue of genetically modified organisms.

I have recently seen three local branch newsletters that have published articles on GMO and one, our local branch, has invited an anti-GMO campaigner to speak at one of our meetings. Of the three articles, two were grossly unbalanced, demonstrating nothing more than the author's leaning on the matter. It wouldn't be so bad if they were about how the GMO issue relates to conservation matters but they weren't.

Forest and Bird members have every right, as individuals, to express their opinions on such matters. However, there are a number of other relevant organisations via which we can do so.

By straying outside our area of focus, we not only take our ener-

gies away from trying to achieve our main goals; we also run the risk of alienating members who wish to be part of our conservation efforts but who don't wish to be involved with other issues.

Before I get labelled as such, no, I am not a pro-GMO campaigner. Whilst I believe that there are a number of positives to be had from GMO, I also agree that there are potential dangers that need to be addressed, but through the right channels.

Simon Fordham, Whitford

Forest and Bird councillors argued their way through such issues at their last annual meeting. The Society's position relates only to the effects that genetically-modified organisms might have on the environment. The council's resolution reads:

'Forest and Bird urges the Government to adopt a precautionary approach to genetic engineering because of the significant uncertainty over the environmental risks of genetically engineered species or their hybrid derivatives becoming established in the wild, to the detriment of indigenous biodiversity or to domestic animal or crop species.'

Natural Planting

We are all indebted to the thousands of enthusiasts who collect and germinate seeds and cuttings of native plants, nurture them and then clamber around the hills, planting them out.

Large berries germinate very freely and often all that is needed after collecting them is to throw them where the trees are wanted. Berries of karaka, tawa, taraire, nikau, pigeonwood, kohekohe, and others such as kawakawa all germinate when they fall among scrub or second growth.

This method is ideal for stony ground where plants cannot be set out. Karaka berries will sprout in grassy areas. I cannot be sure about other berries. Sowing berries of native trees may be nothing new, but it may be a useful idea some conservationists could employ.

Barry Cleverley, Wellington

Cursed Rats

After correcting the proofs of 'An Eradication of Rats' in the November 1999 *Forest & Bird* new mistakes crept in. At one point Mayor Island is said to be in the Bay of Islands whereas it is correctly placed elsewhere in the article in the western Bay of Plenty. Also its Maori name changed from Tuhua to Tuahua.

How can this be?

Kathy Ombler, Wellington.

No one knows, but it has to be our fault. For that matter, the view of Kapiti from the air looked south, not north.

Poor Knights Spill

I hope every effort can be focused on avoiding such disasters as the recent oil slick at the Poor Knights Islands Marine Reserve by re-routing all major shipping outside the islands. Precedents exist on the Great Barrier Reef off Queensland.

I also hope this oil spill will accentuate the need to investigate the oil-spill risk from the nearby *Niagara* wreck. It is releasing oil and could cause major damage to the Northland coast. Responsible techniques for the removal of oil from sunken ships exist and should be evaluated along with a thorough inspection of the wreck.

Wade Doak, Matapouri Bay.

Forest & Bird welcomes comments, up to 200 words in length, on items in the magazine or on environmental matters generally. We reserve the right to edit letters for length and space. Deadline for May letters is March 7.

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