

## Waitakere Branch Seeks Help With Hector's Dolphin

**H**elp with research on the tiny population of North Island Hector's dolphin is being sought by Waitakere Forest and Bird. The branch has already given \$5000 to support the work of a doctoral student at the University of Auckland, Kirsty Russell, who has been studying the marine mammals since 1998.

North Island Hector's dolphin are believed to be genetically different from threatened populations elsewhere in New Zealand. North Island dolphins frequent seas off the west coast of the North Island from about the mouth of the Mokau River, on the Taranaki border, northward to the ocean coasts off Kaipara Harbour and Dargaville, north of Auckland. Their numbers may be as low 100 in the seas between the Taranaki Bight and Manukau Harbour.

Forest and Bird's marine specialist, Barry Weeber, is

very concerned about their future. He is presently pushing for a zero-catch limit on fishermen, commercial and recreational, who may accidentally catch the dolphin in nets.

'Gill nets must be banned from Mokau to Dargaville, from the shore to four nautical miles out,' Barry Weeber says. 'Hector's dolphin are being caught there, along with other dolphin and seals.'

Hector's dolphin is classified as a 'vulnerable threatened species' in the most recent listing of the IUCN/World Conservation Union. A workshop in May agreed that for the northern population to recover, the drowning rate in nets would have to be lower than one dolphin per five years.

'A marine mammal sanctuary needs to be established off the west coast of the North Island between Mokau and Dargaville,' according to Barry Weeber. A sanctuary around

Banks Peninsula has been successful in protecting Hector's dolphin there, though Forest and Bird would like to see it extended along the Canterbury coast from Motunau to Timaru because dolphins continue to die in nets set outside the present sanctuary.

Meanwhile Waitakere Forest and Bird, whose area abuts the coast between the Manukau and Kaipara, have taken the initiative to raise funds and support research into the

North Island dolphins. The information gathered by Kirsty Russell, and others, will be compiled into a report to support marine protection in the area.

*Peter Maddison, chair of Waitakere Forest and Bird, presents a cheque for \$5000 to Kirsty Russell, a student of Auckland University. The money is to support her research into the North Island Hector's dolphin which she has been studying as a doctoral candidate since 1998.*



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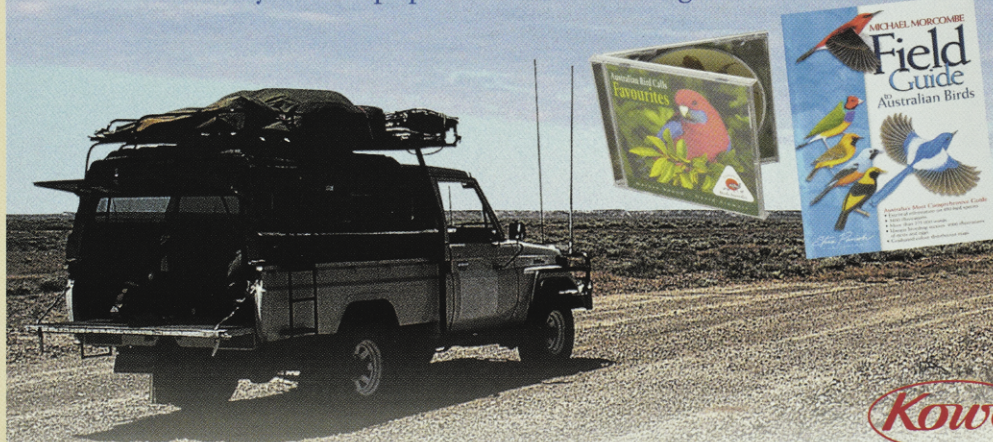
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