

## Beyond the 'Mainland Islands'

**T**wo articles featured in this edition of *Forest & Bird* raise issues central to conservation management in New Zealand, and to species survival.

'Restoration — Windy Hill' and 'Island in the Mist' both deal with the restoration of indigenous forest habitats and give rise to a number of matters that I think would benefit from wider public debate.

Congratulations, first though, to resident Maori of northern Te Urewera and to the shareholders of the Little Windy Hill Company of Great Barrier Island. The work in which these people are engaged throws up some interesting statistics.

The pitifully low bird counts leap out of the pages, as does the enormity of the threats facing native species. The number of these threats is quite staggering: on Great Barrier Island, 1,600 rodents, 21 feral cats, 12 pigs, and 155 goats were taken out of one 20-hectare valley in 18 months. In Te Urewera, 400 possums were taken from a 300-hectare block in just one week.

'Mainland islands', as these areas are fashionably called, seem to be sprouting everywhere. What began as an initiative of the Department of Conservation has also been taken up by territorial authorities and private restoration groups. These 'mainland islands' help native species in their struggle against introduced predators, because they are isolated from the surrounding country-

side by intensive pest control.

It might be timely to consider the name 'mainland island' itself for, on the face of it, 'island' on the mainland is a contradiction in terms. There are of course other names that could be used. We already talk of 'protected natural areas'; 'representative areas'; 'sanctuaries'; 'zones'; and no doubt a few I haven't recalled. Could we perhaps settle on just one name? Personally, I rather like the term 'ecological sanctuary' because it means what it says.

### Keith Chapple asks what happens to our rare birds when they leave the shelter of a 'mainland island'.

For private landowners, these restoration projects will often be 'pockets' of nature surrounded by developed land of one sort or another. When we refer to developed land we often think of farmland and the like, but there are of course many pockets of nature existing in urban areas. Collectively, these areas are important and their establishment and management needs to be encouraged. They provide ecological corridors and go some way — depending on their size — to restoring the natural character of New Zealand.

But encouragement will have to go a lot further than words from the sideline. The Urewera and Windy Hill projects trumpet the need for collaboration between local people, local government, central government, DoC, conservation groups such as Forest and Bird, and (in the case of the Windy Hill Project) Work and Income New Zealand.

Indeed, the Government itself might examine these projects in greater depth for they encompass its policies in each of the environmental, employment, and social service areas. If people can be gainfully employed saving nature, it must surely be of interest to Government agencies.

But what happens outside these ecological sanctuaries? More importantly, what happens *immediately* outside these sanctuaries?

It seems to me the Urewera project is something of a Greek tragedy; it is both a spectacular success and a great sadness. The project is so successful that kokako are now 'seeding' the surrounding forest. What happens to these kokako? I suppose they get eaten by the ravenous horde of pests immediately outside the 'treated' area.

It defies the imagination to suggest that this was the intention of the project, but this must surely be what is happening. One effect must surely be that the spillover of birds from a recovering sanctuary must provide extra rations for neighbouring rats, stoats, ferrets, dogs, cats and so on. Is this something that Forest and Bird is comfortable with?




One way to obviate this very unfortunate side-effect would be to gradually extend such sanctuaries in size, to provide a safe-haven for those birds that are seeded from the core area, until all the core areas join up.

Another way would be to examine the lessons learned in South America. At the beginning of the rainforest destruction in that region, an experiment with variously-sized reserves clearly showed that so far as nature is concerned, 'big is good, small is not so good'.

New Zealand's special species did not evolve in little pockets; they evolved over

vast tracts of forest. Logic tells us that if they are to survive they still need large tracts of safe habitat.

KEITH CHAPPLE QSO is national president of Forest and Bird.



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