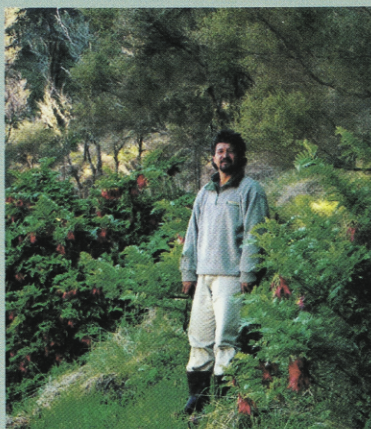


# Kaka Beak Recovery on the East Coast

Ranger Graeme Atkins wants to plant the endangered kaka beak on roadsides from Wainui to Ruatoria on the East Coast, a distance of nearly 100 kilometres, and make that part of State Highway 35 a 'crimson highway'. The scarlet-flowering plant is practically extinct in the wild though it is grown in some gardens as a springtime ornamental.

A biodiversity ranger with the Department of Conservation in Ruatoria, Graeme Atkins located one of the last plants on the Waipare/Nuhiti block, north of Anaura Bay, and raised many plants from its seeds and cuttings. That original plant subsequently died in 1997, nibbled by cows and finally dying in the drought.

The trial planting and care programmes have involved



DoC ranger, Graham Atkins, with roadside planting of kaka beak along SH35, East Coast.

seven schools along the highway. Each school has been helping in the preparation of the land, which is mainly steep roadside cuttings, belonging to either local farmers or Transit New Zealand.

Three years ago the children planted out 80 kaka beak plants, and 56 survived the

rugged conditions. Some are now three metres high and four metres across. The plants have had to suffer the assaults of snails, slugs, hares, rabbits, goats and straying stock. Their weed enemies include smothering weeds such as Mexican daisy, Japanese honeysuckle, briar rose, and fennel.

Graeme Atkins takes the children to their own sites, once a term, to weed the kaka beak, layering the long branches into the ground using a wire hook. This technique creates large, spread-out plants. He then places 'Treepel', a product developed from eggs, which is used in pine plantations, to keep the animal pests at bay.

'Now the kaka beak have grown into quite substantial bushes, the weeds are less of a



The scarlet flowers of kaka beak which is practically extinct in the wild.

problem,' says Graeme Atkins.

'The beauty of this project is that the kids own it,' he says. 'They now understand the importance of our native flora, and that some plants, such as the kaka beak, are endangered. They are all feeling proud of the fact they have been responsible for reviving this endangered species.'

In Conservation Week, 2002, Graeme hopes to plant up to 2000 more kaka beak along the coast. — MEG COLLINS

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