night's confinement in a cage very few of them reoffend.

'The experience seems to be a deterrent.' Many unwanted pets get dumped in the area, but the team is on top of the wild cats now. Not so the mice, which constantly reinvade from surrounding suburbs and pastures. There's not much to be done except to leave them to the harrier and pukeko.

It's been a 20-year job for Forest and Bird, returning Pauatahanui from a dry, gorse wasteland to a vibrant ecosystem. And there's a long way to go yet, but the efforts of people like Stan Butcher and Ron Freeston have captured the surrounding communities — the Stout Trust financed the cottage, which was painted by the Whitby Lions, who also donated money and built a new track. The Porirua Licensing Trust donated landscaping materials;

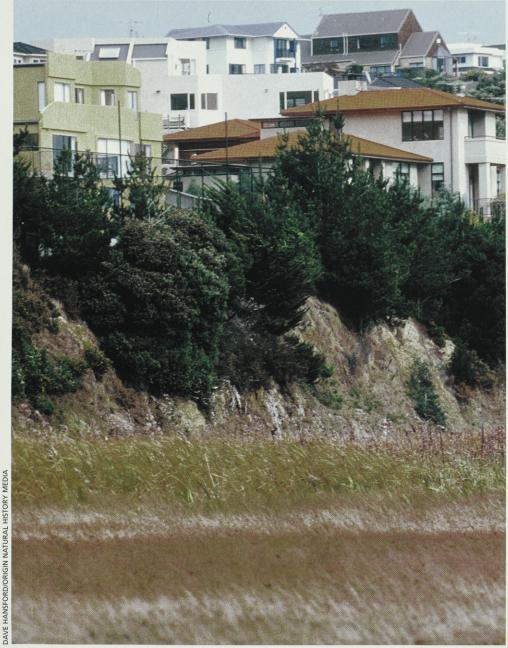
Porirua City Council and the Greater Wellington regional council supply potting mix and gravels. Lotto grants built the barbecues. The latest grant has come from the Nature Heritage Fund; and so it goes

It's not just the birds coming back. Memorial trees line the driveway to the cottage. Beneath them, plaques recall the deceaseds' love of nature — or tranquillity - finding its ultimate expression here at Pauatahanui.

Stan Butcher has known there's something special about the place all along. He still gets a thrill when, each year, the godwits and knots return from their Arctic breeding grounds.

'It's a feeling,' he says. 'Something that keeps you hooked into the place.'

— DAVE HANSFORD is a photo-journalist with a particular interest in natural history.



The growth of housing subdivision above the shores of the Pauatahanui Inlet has changed the nature of the area, 30 kilometres north of Wellington. Run-off from the roads has had a particular effect on the health of the inlet, including the diminishing cockle beds.

