



GILBERT VAN REENEN/CLEAN, GREEN IMAGES

Preserving the Snow

NEVILLE PEAT introduces Te Papanui, a new grasslands park in Otago.

On the curvaceous slopes of the Lammermoor Range, at the eastern edge of Central Otago, the snow tussocks grow densely and head-high in places. The gullies and spurs roll as smoothly as cloud formations in a nor'wester, the colour of straw. For kilometres in any direction there is nothing but tussock grassland. Snow tussocks have never had a finer a showcase than here in Te Papanui Conservation Park.

Te Papanui is Otago's first non-forest conservation park and only the second grasslands park in the country, after Korowai-Torlesse in Canterbury. Unlike the craggy, scree landscapes of the Canterbury park, Te Papanui is softer and more open, with gullies falling away from a 1100 metres plateau area. On a good day the views across to the big, block mountains of Central Otago convey a roof-of-the-world feeling.

Narrow-leaved snow tussock *Chionochloa rigida* is dominant here, rippling in the westerly gales and at other times intercepting the moisture in fog and passing it down to countless streams. Cushionfield plants such as *Phyllachne colensoi* and *Raoulia hectori*, and blue tussock *Poa colensoi*, hold the highest ground. Snowbanks and seepages harbour diverse plant communities. Here you might find patches of gentians, the daisy *Celmisia prorepens* and the rarer aromatic herb *Gingidia baxterae*, a member of the aniseed family.

Where there are spaces between tussocks look out for whipcord hebes, including *Hebe subulata* and *H. poppelwellii*, the straggling subshrub *Gaultheria macrostigma*, and the impressively large daisy *Celmisia semicordata*, with sun-centred flowers attaining the size of saucers.

Feature birds of the area are New Zealand

falcon/karearea, Australasian harrier/kahu and New Zealand pipit/pihoihoi. The invertebrate world is rather more diverse. Some 550 insect species, representing 13 orders, inhabit the Lammermoor area, an invertebrate richness both intriguing and fascinating. Between the tor-studded 'tundra' tops of the adjacent Rock and Pillar Range and the tussocky Lammermoor crests lies a veritable insect city, one of New Zealand's richest invertebrate habitats. A number of the species are found nowhere else.

The new park, 20,882 hectares in area, spreads from the Lammermoors into the slightly higher Lammerlaw Range to the west. About where the two ranges meet there is a compelling geographical feature — the headwaters of the Taieri River. As long as the Whanganui River, the Taieri starts as a network of seepages, stepped pools and finger bogs. Draining north, it