

## United for Nature Conservation

I recently gave the opening address to the New Zealand Deerstalkers' annual conference in New Plymouth. To my knowledge it was the first time in Forest and Bird's 81-year history that such an invitation had been made and accepted because traditionally we saw each other as adversaries.

We talked about our common love of wild New Zealand. We talked about the severe impact of possums, rats, stoats and goats on our native wildlife and plants. We discussed the access challenges facing young hunters as more and more back-country landowners try to commercialise access for hunting. The deerstalkers agreed that national parks and conservation land are the easiest places to access for their hunting. We also talked about the impact of deer, chamois, pigs and thar on native plants and animals. Not surprisingly we didn't reach agreement on large ungulate numbers but we listened to each other and recognised that there are many issues on which we share a common viewpoint and need to cooperate.

Forest and Bird's greatest conservation achievements have occurred when we mobilise all our members and where we also work in partnership with allied groups for common goals.

Over the last 6 months we have worked with 12 other environmental, conservation and recreation groups to fight efforts to weaken the Resource Management Act and reduce public participation. Ironically, although critics claim the Act has been severely damaging to business, the New Zealand economy has in fact grown at an unprecedented rate over the last five years. Our coalition fears that the attacks on the Resource Management Act are designed to ram through a raft of environmentally

destructive schemes to destroy rivers, allow scenic coastline to be further carved up for houses, and sanction unsustainable irrigation and energy schemes.

A tangible achievement from working with Fish and Game is the recent support by the Environment Court for a Water Conservation Order over the Rangitata River.

Our High Country Coalition is a partnership with outdoor and landscape protection groups. We all want nature, the landscape and recreation to be safeguarded in the network of tussockland parks and reserves being created through tenure review and high-country land purchases.

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Partnerships between nature conservation and farming have recently protected Canterbury's Castle Hill basin and much of the Lake Heron basin described in this magazine. In both cases, decades of tireless effort by our local Forest and Bird branches have been vital in raising awareness of the threats to nature. We welcome the Government's central role in protecting these areas.

Tangata whenua and Forest and Bird have joined forces in many parts of New Zealand to seek the protection of nature. Most

recently we worked together to oppose DoC issuing new grazing leases over beech-forested valleys high up the Haast Valley in the heart of the Te Wahi Pounamu-South West New Zealand World Heritage Site.

Our Marine Campaign is also a partnership amongst all the groups which oppose the senseless destruction of marine life. We are working closely with Greenpeace to fight bottom trawling which not only harvests most of the fish species on the ocean floor but also destroys complex and fragile ocean-floor ecosystems. We also work closely with the New Zealand Underwater Association in championing the importance of marine reserves.

Our coalitions extend well beyond New Zealand. Forest and Bird now has Partner Designate status with Birdlife International. Together we are focusing world attention on the plight of albatrosses and working to build support for nature conservation throughout the South Pacific.

Some lobby groups seek to build political parties around outdoor recreation and environment. Forest and Bird owes allegiance to no particular party. Instead we encourage all the political parties to develop sound and far-sighted environment and conservation policies. We support good environmental policies not the political party. That decision we see as our members' individual democratic choice.

Our future challenge is to build even stronger partnerships so that everyone recognises that the protection of the environment — our life-support system — is the world's most important political issue.

— GERRY MCSWEENEY  
National President

### Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand Inc. (Founded 1923)

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