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## Abstracts of papers presented at the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, Inc., AGM and Conference, 1 June 2002, Hokitika, New Zealand

### Westland birds symposium

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West of the South Island's Main Divide are the largest remaining tracts of native forest in New Zealand and some of the most extensive areas of temperate rainforest anywhere. These forests are now the stronghold for several endemic birds. Recently there has been controversy over plans by Timberlands West Coast Ltd to mill large parts of these forests and increasing opposition to the use of the poison 1080 (Sodium monofluoroacetate) to protect the endemic species that live there. These controversies have highlighted the need for information on West Coast birds. The Ornithological Society of New Zealand AGM and Conference held in Hokitika on 1 June 2002 was an opportune time to convene a symposium on Westland birds. The purpose of the symposium was to review our knowledge of Westland birds, to highlight current research and conservation, and to identify where further work is needed.

The symposium began with 4 presentations by Department of Conservation staff detailing current efforts to save 4 threatened or endangered bird taxa, 3 of which are endemic to Westland. The fourth, Fiordland crested penguin (*Eudyptes pachyrhynchus*) also occurs in Fiordland and Stewart Island. The efforts underway to save the 2 kiwi taxa (taxonomy follows Baker et al 1995) – the Okarito rowi (*Apteryx mantelli* "Okarito") and the Haast tokoeka (*A. australis* "Haast") – are nothing short of heroic. The lesson was clear, that without the dedication of the teams involved, the extensive use of poisons to control predators and the financial backing that has made this possible, these kiwi would now be extinct or the deaths of the final few birds imminent.

The contrast between the situation with the kiwi and the two equally distinctive seabird taxa was revealing. Both the Westland petrel (*Procellaria westlandica*) and the Fiordland crested penguin are faced by a variety of threats but conservation of these birds is piecemeal. Conservation relies on the dedication and commitment of a few Department of Conservation staff who have neither the research needed to quantify the problem, nor the financial and logistical backing required to underpin their efforts. The research proposed by Sue Waugh and discussed in the symposium will build on previous

studies by Sandy Bartle and recent work by Freeman & Wilson (2002) to provide some of the research needed to underpin conservation. However, further research on the impacts of predators and the interactions between the petrels and fisheries is needed in order to more effectively focus conservation efforts. Even less is known of either the current status of the penguins (McLean *et al.* 1997) or the threats they face.

Colin O'Donnell presented a retrospective overview of an extensive survey of forest birds in South Westland undertaken between 1983 and 1986 (O'Donnell & Dilks 1986). The presentation left us wondering how much has changed since the Fauna Survey Unit of the Wildlife Service undertook this and other surveys of Westland birds. While the current distribution and status of the critically endangered forest birds is well studied there is little or no recent information on most other species. There are no longer the resources required to undertake these wide ranging surveys and only surveys such as these can provide information on the changing fortunes of common, vulnerable or even threatened species. Twice last century species thought to be extinct, the takahe (*Porphyrio mantelli hochstetteri*) in 1948 and the Chatham Island taiko (*Pterodroma magentae*) in 1978 were rediscovered by private searches. Could this happen again? Some ornithologists think it could, and this time not too far from the symposium venue. Ron Nilsson presented an update on the search for the elusive South Island kokako (*Callaeas cinerea cinerea*), undertaken with minimal support by a small private group.

Richard Holdaway rounded off the symposium by explaining how certain newly developed techniques can reveal insights into the ecology of Westland forests in prehistoric times. He reminded us how important it is to understand the past if we are to put present concerns into context. The symposium finished with a half-hour question session where the audience had the opportunity to put questions to the symposium presenters. It was with regret that the question session was drawn to a close for lunch. Grateful thanks to all the speakers and to John Lyall and others from the West Coast Conservancy of the Department of Conservation who supported this symposium. Thanks to Adrian Paterson and Colin O'Donnell for comments on this introduction. The afternoon session comprised contributed papers and these abstracts are also presented here.

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## Rowi (Okarito brown kiwi) research and management 1992 – 2002

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Rowi (previously referred to as the Okarito brown kiwi) is a unique taxon of kiwi apparently restricted to the 10,000 ha South Okarito Forest. It is a threatened taxon thought to number about 150-250 individuals. Genetically they are more closely related to North Island brown kiwi than South Island brown kiwi but behaviourally they are more similar to South Island kiwi. Rowi have been the subject of research and management since 1992. Adult survival is high, but the period of maximum mortality is the 1st year of life, when a chick is particularly vulnerable to predation, mainly by stoats (*Mustela erminea*). As with other kiwi elsewhere on the main islands of New Zealand, without intervention rowi seem to have extremely low recruitment with fewer than 5% of chicks surviving to adulthood. A variety of methods have been trialed to increase chick survival. Two methods (large-scale trapping of predators and island rearing of juvenile kiwi) have shown great promise and resulted in what is possibly the first significant recruitment into the population for many decades. The merits of each method are discussed and the results of the 2001-2002 breeding season are presented.

## Haast tokoeka sanctuary

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The Haast tokoeka is a threatened taxon of brown kiwi found only between the Waiatoto and Arawhata rivers in South Westland. Most birds