Native Bird Protection, National Identity and the Rise of Preservation in New Zealand to 1914

WHILE THE DEVELOPMENT of national consciousness in New Zealand has been a popular subject of analysis, the role of the indigenous biota, and specifically of birds as symbols of national identity, has attracted few historians. In 1999 an American scholar, attempting a comparative study of ‘nature and nationalism’ for the years 1880-1920 in the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, could only identify one relevant New Zealand secondary source. Nevertheless, native birds in particular have been, and remain, of great significance to ‘kiwi’.

Usually, when New Zealanders speak of the protection of their native birds, even of traditional game species like duck, they mean their preservation from any direct utilization whatsoever. But when MP Gerry Eckhoff, ACT’s conservation spokesperson, suggested recently that kiwi might profitably be farmed, he had in mind a different tradition of conservation, which allows for and encourages the ‘wise use’ or ‘sustainable management’ of some indigenous species. Many were appalled that the bird should be considered in these terms, although in a reasoned response the leader of the Department of Conservation’s kiwi recovery programme concentrated on the impracticality of the idea. The kiwi, he pointed out, is unappetizing and it breeds slowly.

Why should the idea of farming kiwi seem not only impractical but unacceptable to many New Zealanders? The reason, I suggest, is twofold. First, the indigenous flora and fauna have become a strong component of national identity, no species more so than the kiwi, the country’s national symbol. This has made their protection not just a practical but also an emotional issue. Second, many New Zealanders have become acutely aware of both the uniqueness and vulnerability of their indigenous flora and fauna, whose evolution occurred in an isolated fragment of prehistoric Gondwana. This has encouraged the development of an approach to the indigenous environment that stresses preservation more strictly than in other countries. Any suggestion for the utilization of a native species is therefore likely to be dismissed.

The inclusion of huia, kiwi, kea and kaka in New Zealand’s stamp designs for 1895 was perhaps the first clear sign that native birds were entering the nation’s consciousness. There were many less celebrated indications. In the same year, three of the most popular brands of rabbit trap were moa, kiwi and kea, the last an ‘emblem of destruction’. More positively, by 1913 one exhibiter at the Dunedin Horticultural Show was naming new varieties of daffodils after native birds: ‘Huia, a large pale trumpet, and a perfectly lovely Tui, with beautiful curved petals that instantly suggested a bird in flight’. In both these examples, native bird names were brought into play specifically in relation to an exotic...
species. But while New Zealand’s self-image grew out of a supposed melding of the indigenous and the introduced, protection of native species, and also of native bush, confirmed their increasing exclusion from New Zealand’s economy. The two decades up to 1914 were crucial years in the development of this attitude. In particular, the Scenery Preservation Act of 1903 and the Forestry Commission report of 1913 demonstrated a concern with the protection of native bush. By 1911 New Zealand’s European population was at the million mark and nearly two-thirds of the total land area was officially ‘in occupation’, answering to the needs of Western agriculture or pastoralism. As occupation increased, the area of unoccupied land, with its indigenous vegetation cover, decreased. The area of native forest, specifically, decreased from 9 million hectares in 1886 to less than 7 million hectares in 1909. Many came to see that the bush was a finite resource rather than a boundless frontier. This precipitated efforts to save at least a part of what remained. Forest protection is tricky to analyse, however, since bush could be reserved either for preservation or for later exploitation. Here I look instead to the evidence involving native birds, most of which had native forest as their habitat. This is relatively straightforward, since preservation soon emerged as the principal object behind protection. There was only a limited sense of birds having a right to exist for their own sake, but there was an increasingly strong feeling that native birds were beautiful and that their continued existence was significant to New Zealand’s future.

This had certainly not been the case in 1850. While there is little evidence that nineteenth-century European settlers in New Zealand had ‘fear and loathing’ for the indigenous environment — feelings that have been ascribed to them — they were ignorant about it, often indifferent to it, and their purpose was to modify the land in order that they could prosper. They identified with Britain and their emotional attachment was to the creatures familiar from their youth. Once they had established those domestic animals that produced an income, their attention turned to other British species. Many of these had little or no economic worth, but all had recreational or sentimental value attached to them. Immense energy went into the acclimatization of British birds between 1860 and 1880. Yet, from about 1870, the evidence also suggests a loosening of emotional ties with Britain and recognition that what was good for Britain was not necessarily good for New Zealand. There was also a growing awareness of the natural environment that was being transformed. All of this stimulated the preservation of the indigenous.

New Zealand’s animal protection Acts, from 1861 onwards, demonstrate this change in attitude, as legislation designed for another purpose was gradually reshaped into a protective measure for native birds. At first, and with the notable exceptions of snakes and potential killers of livestock like foxes and birds of prey, the main object of such legislation was support of exotic animals. The 1861 Act gave protection to 11 introduced bird species, except during the shooting season. All were British species, and most were traditional game like pheasant and duck. No mention was made of indigenous species, all of which remained unprotected. By 1873 government could also order the protection of imported birds that were not game species. The acclimatization movement was then at its height and introductions were fairly indiscriminate.
The tide had turned by 1882, when a Small Birds Nuisance Act supported ‘the destruction of [introduced] sparrows or other birds injurious to crops’, and after 1895, no animal, bird, insect or reptile could be introduced without the consent of the Minster of Agriculture. Acclimatization continued to have a place in New Zealand, but within defined limits. Support remained for specific game birds, and for deer and fish, but the introduction of British species holus-bolus, from a sense of ‘attachment and loss’, was on the wane.

For native species, the pattern is very different. They were first mentioned in the 1864 amendment to the Animals Protection Act, which protected wild duck, paradise duck and native pigeon outside the shooting season. A dozen native game species were protected by 1873, but, even in the 1880 consolidation of the Act, there was no fundamental change of approach. The turning point could be seen as 1886, when a further amendment specifically allowed for prohibition ‘absolutely . . . [of] the destruction of any bird indigenous to the colony’. This certainly set the scene for protecting native birds other than game, but little resulted until 1896, when protection was given to bellbird, kokako, kakapo, kiwi, saddleback and stitchbird.

Thirty years earlier, Europeans had occasionally considered native birds as a potentially remunerative resource. Liardet of Wellington used seagull feathers in hats, and kiwi skins obtained on the West Coast in the 1860s were made into muffs. However, no significant industries emerged, and by the 1890s there was no European argument for the protection of native birds for this reason. Settlers still wished to protect some native game for sport, but opinion held that New Zealand was ‘a good game country never properly stocked by Nature’ and the Pakeha game-hunting tradition continued to concentrate on introduced species. Protection of native birds as game remained a factor in legislation. Scientist James Hector, for instance, suggested protection of the native snipe in 1900 because it was “difficult to shoot, and afforded capital sport”, but this was certainly not the main incentive for indigenous protection by 1914.

The species newly listed in 1896 were no good for sport and they had no economic value, unless as a backdrop for the emerging tourist industry. Clearly then, they were protected quite specifically because they were native and becoming scarce. Their protection related to a growing feeling among people of European descent in New Zealand, that their own identity was linked to the land in which they lived and to the environment that rendered it unique.

In a rare reference to native birds, Keith Sinclair placed tui with fairies and gypsy girls as one of the ‘romantic props’ used by these early seekers of national identity, contrasting this with the subject matter of later poetry by Rex Fairburn and others who ‘dealt with real life’. Sinclair ignored the fact that tui were, and are, real, as well as romantic. An increasing number of so-called Europeans, born or at least brought up in New Zealand, felt no sentimental attachment to British birds but, rather, sentiment for natives such as the tui. They proved more ready than their parents to disown introduced species not only as agricultural pests, but also as competitors to native birds for the fruit of the forest.

By the turn of the century, awareness of the undesirable consequences of exotic introductions had grown acute. When a couple of raccoons escaped from
Rotorua Zoo in 1905, the government swiftly tracked them down.\textsuperscript{16} The effects of grain-eating sparrows and greenfinches, stoats and weasels, possum and deer were intensely debated. In 1906 the naturalist James Drummond published a series of articles entitled ‘Friends or foes? New Zealand’s feathered immigrants: Was their introduction a mistake?’ A 1900 issue of the \textit{Southland Times} detailed expenditure by the Southland County Council of £460.12s.5d. on the destruction of small birds (all introduced) in the previous 12 months. Boys brought in, and were paid for, 485,280 eggs and heads, while many more deaths resulted from the distribution of poison. On the following page, ‘Sportsman’ complained of the slaughter of native pigeons and paradise duck in Hokonui Bush by ‘ruthless bands of butchers’.\textsuperscript{17}

The revision of the Animals Protection Act in 1900 confirmed widespread concern at the decline of native birds whether they were game birds or not. The government had already created three island reserves for birds in the 1890s, which was sufficient to bring complaints of a ‘sanctuary craze’.\textsuperscript{18} Caretaker Richard Henry’s vivid reports of bird transfers to Resolution Island increased awareness of kiwi and kakapo in particular, and of the vulnerability of such flightless species to predation by stoats and weasels. This became part of a wider debate about mustelids, with many arguing that their destruction of native birds had greater significance than their effect on rabbit numbers.\textsuperscript{19}

Harry Ell of Canterbury entered Parliament in 1899 and soon claimed ‘unanimity of opinion that every effort should be made to save our native birds from destruction’.\textsuperscript{20} He promoted bird protection, like scenery preservation, as a valuable component of European settlement rather than an impediment. For him, ‘the disappearance of forests for the advance of settlement was necessary, and that made it essential that more should be done for the protection of native birds’.\textsuperscript{21} He wanted notices in every post office and railway station listing protected species, and he thought government should print and distribute colour pictures ‘to make the school-children more familiar with . . . the more interesting specimens of the New Zealand native birds, instead of having only as an object lesson the cards of English birds’.\textsuperscript{22} In fact, pictures of native birds, increasingly viewed in the absence of the real thing, had long been available. J.G. Keulemans’ illustrations appeared in Walter Buller’s \textit{History of New Zealand Birds} from 1873. These were now supplemented by the photographs in W.H. Guthrie-Smith’s \textit{Birds of Water, Wood and Waste} (1910) and by Edgar Stead’s popular lantern lectures on New Zealand birds.\textsuperscript{23}

Even before a major overhaul of the Animals Protection Act, there was scope for adding new native birds to the list of protected species. Particular attention was paid to the huia, a bird celebrated for its beauty. Everyone could see that the huia had become extremely scarce. The visibility of its absence made it a far more effective advertisement for native bird protection than the shy and inconspicuous bittern, the subject of a parallel call for protection. In 1905, Ell asked that ‘a few couples [of huia] be placed on Little Barrier Island, Kapiti Island, and Resolution Island’.\textsuperscript{24} Government already had people looking for them with transfer in mind. The continued failure to find any surely brought home to people just how greatly native bird numbers had declined.\textsuperscript{25} An
extraordinary development of concern had certainly taken place by 1906, when a notice in the *New Zealand Gazette* listed about 130 indigenous species — almost all indigenous species, in fact — which were now to have ‘absolute protection’.26

The scientific value of New Zealand’s birds as a unique and peculiar evolutionary development, although already appreciated by many, was not referred to in the parliamentary debates on animal protection. Their potential in attracting tourists, however, was acknowledged. In 1898, the government sent Lake Ayson to America, principally to investigate their fisheries, but he came back in 1900 with notions of what attracted tourists generally. He thought New Zealand should ‘take a leaf out of their [the United States’] book and add to the attractiveness of the land by preserving our remarkable and indigenous birds’.27 The botanist Leonard Cockayne early pointed to the paradox that the country sought to attract tourists yet squandered its native fauna.28

Before 1900, while displacement theory held sway, the decline of the native bird population appeared biologically inevitable, rendering any attempt to save them at best a delaying tactic, at worst a waste of time. In the 1900s, however, Cockayne and others referred to the continued existence of native flora and claimed such theorizing was spurious.29 Despite a greater pessimism concerning native birds than native flora, evident in botanist Thomas Kirk’s 1895 article on displacement, their future no longer appeared intrinsically hopeless.30 In 1907 James Drummond thought it ‘quite probable that no native bird has been completely exterminated since Europeans came to New Zealand’.31 Dr Robert Fulton pointed out that ‘although where we are the birds are undoubtedly scarce, there are millions of acres of native bush where still our birds exist in great number’.32

Yet even here they were threatened. A correspondent to the *Southland Times*, camping in remote Chalky Inlet in 1895, found that ‘kakapos came round our tent in such numbers that we could get no rest’. They solved the problem the next night when they ‘took the precaution to have a dog with us, and he did terrible havoc among them’. Significantly, though, there was immediate protest at this ‘unblushing, thoughtless, cruel, and damning admission of vandalism... [towards] rare specimens of native birds... against whose destruction the restraining hand of every lover of nature and true patriot should be protectively extended’.33

A prejudice against native birds, evident in the nineteenth century, was now gradually replaced by an opposite prejudice working in their favour. Even the kea, for half a century damned for its ‘flesh-eating propensity’, was championed by Cockayne, who (incorrectly) thought it a myth that they attacked sheep.34 He also spoke up for the shag, another native bird that few had felt inclined to protect.35 Support for native species in toto, which is now standard in New Zealand, can be traced back to Cockayne, but was an attitude still unusual in his day. James Drummond found that sentiment for British birds was still strong in the 1900s, and the beauty and desirability of birds in general was frequently expressed.36
There was, undoubtedly, widespread awareness not only of the decrease in bush, but also of the native birds that had lived there. Another correspondent to the *Southland Times* travelled from Orepuki to Waiau in 1900 and identified only progress: ‘Where all was virgin forest . . . there are to-day smiling homesteads and large clearings . . . Native birds of all kinds are conspicuous by their absence, the only birds met with now being of the domestic variety, and the roosters crow as merrily as if they had owned all the land prior to the advent of Captain Cook.’ The correspondent apparently felt no regret at this, but at much the same time, with an implicit ‘environmental anxiety’, the Christchurch poet Blanche Baughan described a land ‘Naked, denuded, /Forestless, fernless, /Mute, now, and songless . . .’, while the heroine of William Satchell’s *The Toll of the Bush* (1905) noted bellbirds were: ‘very rare . . . I have not heard one for years. Yet father remembers when the bushes were thronging with them. Then the tuis are not so plentiful as they were. Soon the forests will be silent as a graveyard.’ ‘J. Rimu’, in 1913, regretted that so few South Island robins remained in his area. ‘My boy is twelve years old in September’, he wrote, ‘and was reared in the bush and that was the first robin he had seen; and in another twelve years there will be boys in the Catlins who will not have seen a tui’.

The naturalist W.W. Smith’s observation of 1908 is particularly genuine and poignant: ‘No words or language can adequately express the feelings of regret of the truenaturalist and nature-lover to know that already, within the period of fifty years of settlement within New Zealand, some of the most remarkable species of birds man has seen or since known have vanished forever from our green forests, grassy plains and reedy swamps, which almost everywhere existed in their full native beauty when European settlement began’. For many older settlers like Smith who had been in New Zealand for several decades, sentiment that had initially been directed towards British species they had left behind was now redirected towards native birds that had become familiar in their early adulthood.

David Buddo, the Minister of Internal Affairs, felt that ‘most of our old settlers have practically disassociated themselves from the bird-life of the older countries; and knowing how essential it is to bring up young people with a taste for natural life that is interesting to them, and remembering how much interest there was in this subject in the Old Country, they are anxious to preserve the native-bird life of this Dominion’. He argued that the country’s youth should be educated ‘to protect what is the most interesting portion of the native life of New Zealand, which has been such a pleasure to old settlers, and which will be as great a pleasure to the young people themselves when they grow up’.

James Allen considered it ‘the duty of every person in the country to try and educate the people to a proper appreciation of our national life; and one of the first elements, I believe, is the cultivation of a spirit of respect for our own flora and fauna’. The major incentive for native bird protection had thus become sentiment which, by 1910, was clearly bolstered by an incipient nationalism. ‘W.B.’ appreciated frequent mention of native birds in the children’s column in the *Otago Witness*, because ‘it does much for patriotism, as it must foster a love of Nature in its many readers, and Nature-lovers cannot help being lovers of their country’.
Pakeha interest in Maori culture in this period, found in the writings of Edward Tregear, Johannes Andersen and James Cowan, has been linked by historians to an awakening sense of national identity. In the same way, interest in native birds and their protection also became an expression of nationhood. J.W. Hall, a chemist in Thames, experimented with planting native trees from 1873 onwards, by 1900 disproving ‘the mistaken idea that they are difficult to culture’. One of his objects was ‘to induce visits of our rapidly disappearing native birds’, and presently he was able to record that ‘frequent visits of the rio-rio, the piwakawaka, and the kotare, with occasional incursions of the ruru, the tui, and the pipiwharauroa, and still more rare appearance of the kaka, kukupa, kohoperoa, weka, and miromiro, have amply repaid my expectations’. Such an extensive use of Maori names was surely deliberate, and suggests a search for identity as much through native bird names as through the birds themselves. Similar approaches to their subject matter have already been identified in surveyors and ethnologists, and explained as ‘cultural appropriation’ to create a new ‘cultural space’.

It is ironic that many European-born settlers were now keen to protect native birds by prohibiting their slaughter, when this seemed to be carried out mostly by the New Zealand-born. The offenders were often perceived to be young Pakeha (gun-owners with no sense of sportsmanship, or boys with peashooters), and Maori (destroyers of tui, huia and pigeon). This brought protectionists into conflict both with the youth for whose benefit they wished to preserve native species, and with the indigenous race whose revival was now heralded as possible along with the survival of native birds.

Recent overseas research has linked the creation of wilderness areas with the destruction of indigenous cultures. In line with this approach, some have stressed the connections between the erosion of Maori harvesting rights to native birds and the ‘preservationist’ approach to animal protection, notably in the period from 1895. Native bird preservation was concerned with much else besides, which until now has been underplayed. Nevertheless, this cultural component deserves full consideration.

While in general Maori opposed the Pakeha approach to native bird protection, their own practice of blending protection with utilization had parallels with (as well as differences from) the European game-hunting tradition. Maori understanding of native bird decline, together with their rationale for harvesting native birds, was long established and consistent. Already in 1885, upon receiving a complaint that 2200 tui had been killed for a feast, the Native Minister explained that Maori had ‘always been accustomed to destroy tuis when they were fat, and had been doing so for five hundred years’. Furthermore, he added, ‘the decrease of native birds was due to the burning of the bush . . . [and thus] Europeans, and not natives, were destroying them’. In fact, though the process of European settlement was indeed the reason for declining bird populations, once the numbers sank below a certain level there was some justification for legislation against any specific destruction of the species in the attempt to ensure its survival. Concern was at the killing of birds whether by Maori or Pakeha, and at least government minister Dillon Bell tried to place the interests of native flora and fauna above the concerns of lobbyists, whatever their race.
The causes of native bird decline were (and are) complex and imperfectly understood. Cultural harvesting, larrikins’ peashooters, swivel guns and government-released stoats and weasels were all more-identifiable factors than habitat decline. But already, by 1900, many were well aware of the importance of habitat to protection. Robert McNab pointed out that ‘We prosecute a man for killing a tui, yet we make it a condition in many of our settlement laws that a man must cut down the home of the tui — bush — on his section or have his holding forfeited’.

Pakeha provisions for native bird protection, intruding on Maori practice, were tightened up in precisely those years when European occupation was extending primarily into areas that, as Maori land, had until then been rich in both native forest and native birds. For Maori, this was particularly galling. When one of their parliamentary representatives, Hone Heke, following on McNab, referred to ‘the extension of settlement, . . . [which] tends to bring about the limitation of areas for the growth of these native birds’ the racial dimension to this argument becomes clear. Cultural harvesting, far more than Pakeha settlement, had been highlighted as contributing to native bird decline, despite reiteration by Maori that they ‘never kill birds out of the proper season; [and] they never shoot a bird unless it is fat, and fit for the pot’.

Support for this perspective was not limited to Maori. Publications by Andersen and Elsdon Best had increased European awareness of indigenous conservation practices. Richard Monk understood that Maori ‘carefully conserved their game’ through rahui which protected muttonbirds, tui, kaka and kiwi, and he considered Europeans ‘sadly inferior to the old Native chiefs in this matter’. When changes to shooting licences and seasons were proposed in 1903, Pakeha politicians were among those anxious to see that Maori rights to kill native birds were not interfered with. But with an increasingly specific concern by Europeans with native birds, the differences in emphasis — Pakeha wishing to shoot fast birds for sport, if to kill them at all, Maori to snare fat birds for food — became all the more plain.

While Maori blamed Europeans, various Pakeha proponents of native bird preservation made statements that pointed the finger at Maori. In 1907, Thomas Mackenzie, appalled by the reputed destruction of 3000 tui by Maori at Parihaka, felt that, ‘notwithstanding the Treaty of Waitangi, we have reached that stage in this country that if the Natives will not assist in protecting that which is so beautiful, then the laws of the country will have to do so’. In 1908, Harry Ell told the Minister of Internal Affairs he wanted immediate action to ‘stop the willful destruction of our Native birds, particularly by the Maoris’. In 1911 the Inspector of Scenic Reserves, E. Phillips Turner, ‘strongly deprecated’ the Maori practice of ‘ornamenting baskets and mats . . . with the feathers of kiwis, tuis, and kakas’.

Recent historians have been quick to identify this element of cultural conflict in environmental disputes, but those who sought to protect New Zealand’s birds and forests in the 1900s were as much opposed — if not more — to a reckless expansionism and profit-seeking displayed by some Pakeha. They wished for the recognition of other values and for a broader concept of national interest.
This is most dramatically illustrated by the concern felt for the sub-Antarctic fauna, where the conflict was with commercial interests and not at all with Maori practice. The situation on Macquarie Island, in particular, juxtaposed the interests of exploitation and preservation. Two groups camped on these normally unoccupied islands in 1913. One group, part of Douglas Mawson’s Antarctic expedition, included the son of the director of the Dominion Museum and was engaged in scientific research. The other consisted of employees of Joseph Hatch of Invercargill, engaged in slaughtering and boiling down penguins. Thomas Kelly was far from alone in wondering why a ‘money-grubbing company’ was permitted to ‘utilise these beautiful birds by melting them down in order to add a little to the oil-yield of the world’.

Macquarie Island was an Australian possession, and it was an Australian initiative, led by Mawson, which eventually obtained its designation as a sanctuary in 1933. Local protection always both reflected and sustained a wider international movement. While the protection of New Zealand birds developed out of an awareness of their scarcity together with a re-placement of sentiment away from British national icons, a parallel concern overseas encouraged preservation in New Zealand and gave it respectability and direction. Already in 1908 the politician R.H. Rhodes was referring to new bird protection measures in America which indicated ‘the time had come when all [‘wild birds’] should be protected, except those that were injurious’. Thomas Mackenzie agreed that ‘with few exceptions — perhaps the case of the shags or hawks and keas — none of the native birds should be allowed to be destroyed — at any rate, not by Europeans’. A significant new clause was added to the Animals Protection Bill of 1910, proposing that ‘all native birds [be] protected unless specifically exempted’. The ensuing legislation allowed for a fine of £30 for destroying or injuring an indigenous bird.

In 1913, the Minister of Internal Affairs received a deputation concerned at ‘the threatened extinction of New Zealand fauna’. The Minister of Defence, visiting England that year, inquired into steps being taken there to protect birds. Mackenzie, by this time the High Commissioner in London, drew attention to New Zealand examples in a lecture to the Royal United Service Institution on ‘the plumage bill in relation to the British Empire’. Six months later the New Zealand Institute approved ‘the principles embodied in the Plumage Bill at present before the British Parliament’. Rhodes therefore introduced the 1914 Animals Protection Amendment Bill in uncontentious fashion when he said that ‘many of the birds indigenous to this country have become exceedingly rare — some, I fear extinct, and it behoves the Government to do what they can for the protection of those that remain’. The bill sought compulsory acquisition of land for bird sanctuaries.

By 1914, Harry Ell could confidently claim to represent a popular movement, and called for a New Zealand Plumage Bill to protect the kiwi. In the same debate, Dunedin scientist G.M. Thomson promoted ecological restoration, referring to ‘persons desirous of keeping birds, and of rearing them, and in that way to restock the bush’. Other parliamentarians suggested bird sanctuaries on Codfish and Poor Knights Islands, and approached the question of their
At the same time, both the New Zealand Institute and the Southland Acclimatisation Society recommended warning notices and rangers to render Stewart Island's sanctuary status effective. Native birds were now legally protected, but it remained to explore how their continuing survival could be turned into a practical reality.

A glimpse beyond the legislation and parliamentary debate, closer to the change in people's thinking which they reflected, is gained from ‘Dot's Little Folk' and ‘Our Public School's Column’ in the Otago Witness at this time. As the birds sing and trill in the native bush', wrote David Wright, ‘by all means encourage all young people to be bright and merry and glad'. It was their 'inalienable birthright'. Here, children and the general public were indeed encouraged to write whatever was on their minds. This was a younger age group than was represented in Parliament, and the writers were as often female as male. Frequently, they wrote of nature. They often chose their pen-names from nature, displaying an interesting amalgam of exotic and indigenous influences. Similarly, the traditional European custom of noting the first cuckoo underwent a metamorphosis, with some Pakeha now watching for the first native shining cuckoo.

One regular adult correspondent in these columns, 'Makinihi' of Dunedin, felt that 'the Government should . . . stave off the immediate extinction of our unique avifauna' by looking after them in aviaries. He condemned government for failing to enforce native bird protection legislation, and denounced rich overseas collectors who still sought to procure native birds. 'There is a crying necessity', he wrote, 'for the formation of a New Zealand Native Birds Protection League, to protect, and to see that the present laws are vigilantly upheld and strictly enforced'. 'Makinihi' was one of a new breed of environmental watchdogs and activists who, after the Great War, spoke through the Forest and Bird Protection Society.

But it is evident that native bird protection became an important issue in the two decades before 1914, as many older settlers became acutely conscious of the declining indigenous environment. For the rising generation, native birds were part of a blend of the indigenous and the exotic that made up their lives, and the part that their elders increasingly encouraged them to appreciate as their heritage. The experience of the Great War is often described as accentuating nationalism and assisting New Zealand to gain a sense of its identity. While this may well be so, it in fact cut across and delayed formal recognition of a uniqueness which, before 1914, was already expressed through concern for the native flora and fauna. The Forest and Bird Protection Society, founded in 1913, suffered when the energy of its members was diverted into the war effort. It was not revived until 1923, nor were there any fresh developments in animal protection legislation during the war.

In the attitudes and events of the years prior to the Great War, we first clearly see the growth of sentiment for native birds, the beginning of their association with national identity, and moves for their legal protection. This much can be documented, and not only for New Zealand. Since then, New Zealand has become increasingly steadfast in preservation of the indigenous remnant, through protection of both species and ecosystems.
The early evidence alone, however, does not explain why preservation gained so distinctly strong a hold in New Zealand. It should be viewed alongside the knowledge that the transformation of New Zealand’s natural environment, under pressure of European settlement, was both remarkably fast and remarkably thorough, and was at its peak in these years. While other nineteenth-century settlements ran parallel (in California, for instance), no other situation quite equalled the unpreparedness of New Zealand’s indigenous ecosystems for human and mammalian impact.

Once New Zealand had broken free from the rest of the Gondwana landmass, about 80 million years ago, only birds could fly there. Its terrestrial ecosystems therefore evolved without a mammalian component (except for bats), and without human input. Māori, the indigenous people, are themselves a recent presence and the indigenous flora and fauna are implicitly ill-suited to human utilization. In the absence of terrestrial mammals, New Zealand’s birds became, in the words of an Australian ecologist, ‘the ecological equivalent of giraffes, kangaroos, [and] sheep’. It was indeed natural for national sentiment to focus on birds as faunal icons.

In New Zealand, furthermore, there was a closer synchronicity than elsewhere between scientific understanding of the uniqueness of this environment and the numerical ascendancy of native-born Europeans. Alfred Wallace published Island Life, or, The Phenomena and Causes of Insular Faunas and Floras in 1880; immigrants were first outnumbered in the census of 1886. And only in New Zealand did the ecosystem under threat coincide so exactly with the geopolitical area inhabited by the people who were beginning to assert their nationhood. Not only social but also biological and geographical factors dictated that Europeans in New Zealand would not long remain indifferent to their unique birdlife. Being largely unable, even if willing, to integrate it into any Western model of food production or industry, it only remained to preserve it.

Native bird protection should not be viewed in isolation from the wider perspective of concern for the forest (and, indeed, for all aspects of the country’s indigenous heritage), but it does present the clearest example of change in attitude. It was powered both by the physical evidence of a decline in what might be celebrated, and by a social desire to identify and hold onto the things which made New Zealand special. An increasing emphasis on preservation, with an exclusive appreciation of both native birds and ‘virgin’ bush, resulted. The belief that the remnant should be put aside to be protected and revered, rather than harvested or spent, had taken shape by 1914 and it has gained in influence ever since.

PAUL STAR

Dunedin
NOTES


5 Otago Witness (OW), 21 March 1895, pp.6–8.

6 OW, 8 October 1913, p.64.


8 The Society for the Protection of Animals, well established by 1900, concerned itself only with domestic animals of exotic origin. Their influence is clear in legislation against live pigeon-shooting matches, not in native bird protection, but such laws also suggest a new, less functional approach to animal life in general. See *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (NZPD)*, 1900, 111, p.93.


12 Kaka were absolutely protected from 1888. Tui were protected as game, and white heron, crested grebe and hui were added to the schedule of native game in the 1890s.


14 *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute (TNZI)*, 33 (1900), p.552.


16 NZPD, 1905, 134, p.57.

17 Southland Times (ST), 11 April 1900, pp.2–3.

18 NZPD, 1905, 132, p.144.

19 Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR), 1895, C-1; 1897, C-1; 1898, C-1; 1899, C-1; Susanne and John Hill, *Richard Henry of Resolution Island*, Dunedin, 1987.

20 NZPD, 1900, 113, p.34.

21 NZPD, 1908, 145, p.66.


24 NZPD, 1905, 133, p.149.

25 See NZPD, 1906, 137, p.503; 1913, 164, p.767; 1914, 170, p.481.

26 *New Zealand Gazette*, 10 May 1906, p.1191.

27 ST, 7 April 1900, p.2.


Native bird protection, however, was advocated at some New Zealand Natives Association meetings (of New Zealand-born Europeans) around the turn of the century. Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart*, p.42.


49 OW, 15 August 1885, p.9.
50 NZPD, 1914, 170, p.239.
51 NZPD, 1900, 113, p.30.
53 NZPD, 1900, 113, p.32.
54 ibid., p.36.
55 Johannes C. Andersen, *Maori Life in Ao-tea*, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1907, and Elsdon Best, ‘Maori Forest Lore: being some account of native forest lore and woodcraft, as also of many myths, rites, customs, and superstitions connected with the flora and fauna of the Tuhoe or Ure-wera district’, Part I *TNZI* 40 (1907) pp.185–254, Part II 41 (1908) pp.231–86, Part III 42 (1909) pp.433–81 (details of rahui, p.434).
56 NZPD, 1900, 113, p.25.
57 NZPD, 1903, 126, pp.69–74.
58 NZPD, 1907, 142, p.790.
59 H.G. Ell to Dr Findlay, 15 February 1908, IA1 1908/383, National Archives, Wellington, quoted in Feldman, *Treaty Rights and Pigeon Poaching*, p.27.
60 AJHR, 1911, C-6, p.5.
61 See OW, 3 September 1913, pp.8, 36; 1 October 1913, p.68.
62 NZPD, 1905, 132, p.305.
63 NZPD, 1908, 145, p.62.
64 NZPD, 1910, 151, p.266. Harry Ell also noted that Australia now had an annual Bird Day.
65 NZPD, 1910, 152, p.24.
66 NZPD, 1910, 153, p.115; New Zealand Statutes, 1910, pp.63–64.
67 OW, 23 July 1913, p.10.
68 OW, 30 July 1913, p.68.
69 NZPD, 1914, 170, p.478.
70 ibid., pp.479, 480, 482–4.
71 TNZI, 46 (1913), p.384.
72 OW, 26 November 1913, p.71.
73 OW, 22 October 1913, p.11.
74 OW, 19 February 1913, p.71.
75 OW, 17 May 1913, p.73.
76 Sinclair, A Destiny Apart, p.171; McIntyre, ‘Imperialism and Nationalism’, p.344.