Conflict: Protest Words to Action in the Forest 1970–78

9

C.M. King, D.J. Gaukrodger and J.R. Hay

Abstract
This chapter summarises the background to the refusal of NZ Forest Service to accept the NZ Wildlife Service's recommendations to halt logging in the parts of Pureora State Forest occupied by the kokako, a threatened endemic bird, and the public protests and tree-sitting action that followed. A high-profile seminar in Taupo in March 1978 debated the issue at length, and stimulated 1735 public submissions.

Keywords
NZ Wildlife Service surveys · North Island kokako · Habitat valuation · Yellow-crowned parakeet · Kakariki · Native Forests Action Council (NFAC) · Anti-logging actions · Stephen King · Tree-sitting protests · NZFS seminar in Taupo March 1978

The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society (RFBPS) and its predecessor, the New Zealand Native Bird Protection Society, and the Waipoua Forest campaign led by Professor W.R. McGregor in 1948 [22], had been drawing official and public attention to the continued decline of native forest fauna since 1923, but with limited or only local effect. Conservation did not become a public issue in New Zealand until remarkably recently. Suddenly, in the mid-late 1960s, the sleepers awoke.

> With an abundance of clean water, with clear and clean air on all but the worst days, and with mountains and bush-covered hills within easy access of almost all parts of the country, there were many who believed that New Zealand was indeed "God's Own" country [so, with no worries about nature] …..diversification of the economy, which was still almost entirely based on primary industries, became a national goal. It was in this climate that the decision was taken to raise the level of Lake Manapouri to provide electricity for an aluminium smelter…..the government….imagined that New Zealanders would accept the loss of the lake as the necessary price of progress….they were wrong [32: 7].

C.M. King (✉)
School of Science, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand
e-mail: cmking@waikato.ac.nz

D.J. Gaukrodger
3a Te Angi Street, Turua, RD4, Thames 3574, New Zealand
e-mail: beejaygauk@xtra.co.nz

J.R. Hay
Department of Conservation, Te Papa Atawhai, Private Bag 4715, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand
e-mail: rhay@doc.govt.nz

© Crown Copyright 2015
C.M. King et al. (eds.), *The Drama of Conservation*,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-18410-4_9

As historian Michael King put it,

> New Zealand's first national conservation campaign… heightened awareness of the need for conservation of natural resources in general and turned the country away from its pioneering phase of simply 'quarrying' those resources into extinction. …The National [conservative] Government of the day - and the opposition, whose ranks still included Hugh Watt, who had been so proud of the [Manapouri] project, was taken wholly by surprise [10: 378].

The success of the Save Manapouri campaign of 1971 changed the outcome of the 1972 General Election. It made conservation groups realise for the first time that they could put a hot conservation issue centre stage in front of the voting public, and generate the sort of response, from thousands of previously disinterested people, that politicians could no longer ignore.

Hence, the Manapouri campaign continued to influence events for years after its own immediate battle was won. It was the first to clearly identify a wider, fundamental problem that had hitherto been ignored in the rush to develop the national economy. Michael King put his finger on it.

> Some State agencies were committed to developmental policies that took no heed of environmental considerations. This became the basis of another set of disputes that broke out in the early 1970s over the use of native forests. The protagonists were senior executives of the New Zealand Forest Service, who wanted to continue to log mature native trees for timber, and environmental groups such as Forest & Bird who argued that the natural and ecological values of such forests outweighed the commercial gains from harvesting - and in the process destroying – them [10: 381].

This new set of disputes concerned the west Taupo forests, which had covered some 100,000 ha of the central North Island since time immemorial. Up to about 1950, they had seemed inexhaustible. Then, in the early 1970s, RFBPS and many other conservation groups began to read reports from the New Zealand Wildlife Service (NZWS) that described the current progress of clearfelling, so rapid and drastic that by 1978 only about 17 % of this huge forest remained unlogged [32, 33].

Over the protests of NZWS, the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) was continuing to log native forest—with predictable consequences for the last few known populations of North Island kokako, an especially beautiful and severely endangered endemic forest bird. Although the kokako and most other native birds had been legally protected since 1953, it was not illegal to destroy the only habitats in which they could live—even though many of these species could live nowhere else in the world but in New Zealand. Local extermination of kokako in logging areas began to seem inevitable, to be followed, very probably, by total extinction (Chap. 13). Even Shakespeare could have predicted that risk, when he put into Shylock's mouth the words: "You take my life when you do take the means whereby I live".

How could this be happening in New Zealand, a country which is a recognised pioneer in conservation legislation? New Zealand had established one of the first National Parks in the world—Tongariro, donated to the nation by Te Heuheu Tukino Horonuku in 1887 and reserved by Act of Parliament in 1894 (Chap. 5). By the end of 1960 there were eight more national parks and more than 1000 gazetted scientific and scenic reserves; and NZFS had created 16 State Forest Parks by 1978 (Chap. 6).

The answer suggested by Wright [33] was that first, the protection offered to these reserved areas was, as Manapouri showed, not cast-iron. Second, many important habitats were not represented in the existing reserves system, including the dense podocarp forests where some threatened endemic species such as the kokako can reach high densities. Third, decisions were being made based on information that was being withheld from some of the interested parties. Finally, environmental groups were divided among themselves, dispersed around the country, generally subjective in their assessments, far removed from decision-making processes, and sometimes unaware of how to fight effectively for their convictions.

The Manapouri campaign went on for years, and gave the environmental groups valuable training for their next big challenge in the central North Island. On the other hand, unlike the Manapouri issue, the argument over logging the west Taupo forests was not simply about scenery

and birds versus profits for big business; it also had important socio-economic dimensions for local sawmilling communities (Chap. 8).

Wildlife Service Surveys and Recommendations

During the 1960s, NZFS began to consider the ideas of multiple use and recreation in indigenous forests (Chap. 6), which eventually led to the development of the forest park concept [25: 272]. Independently, NZWS had begun to develop techniques for systematic bird surveys on the mainland in the late 1960s [8].

In 1970 they got together, and NZFS requested NZWS to survey forest areas scheduled for multiple use management, starting with a 40,000 ha block on the Mamaku Plateau. The surveys aimed to estimate the effects of timber production on native fauna and to provide data from which to determine the sizes and locations of reserves. An experienced NZWS officer, Ian Crook, commented with some astonishment that this was the first time that systematic studies of wildlife distribution had *preceded* planned forest operations [2].

The Mamaku experience helped establish the methods later used to survey over 80,000 ha around Pureora. NZWS concluded that a small, mobile unit of 3–6 teams of two people each could collect detailed information on the numbers and habitats of most native species in 40,000 ha of forest per month. But, Crook warned, handling these data exceeded the processing capacity of the small NZWS staff (they were then only a sub-section of the Department of Internal Affairs), so interpreting them would be as difficult as collecting them.

NZWS surveyed the west Taupo forests in the winters of 1970 and 1971, and again in 1974 and in 1976, including a total of 15,000 ha sampled at >600 bird-counting stations and 3000 substations of vegetation samples [8]. NZWS mapped their results to show the presence (or apparent absence) of a given species per 1000 yard square of the then (non-metric) National Grid. Teams followed transects by compass, 1000 yards apart, recording the results in 1000 yard blocks (Fig. 9.1).

Interpretation of positive records is often easy, but, as in most scientific endeavours and especially in bird surveys, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Negative records have to be corrected for differences between species in conspicuousness (colour, volume and pitch of song), time of day, weather, behaviour (migration, foraging height), and many other variations in the probability of detection.

Bird survey methods have been refined since the 1970s, but nevertheless the early data showed clearly that there were important differences in the distribution of some key species with habitat. In forest of Class L (see Box 2.1), dominated by podocarps 27–40 m tall at 75–125 trees per hectare, the average number of pairs per station in 1973 was 1.7 kokako, 0.7 yellow-crowned parakeets and 1.1 robins, whereas in forest Class M, where fewer tall podocarps (25/ha) emerged above a broadleaved lower story, these figures were 0.3, 0.3 and 0.6 [2].

Despite all their uncertainties, these data left no doubt about the obvious conclusion: some classes of forest support more threatened native species than others. NZWS concluded that the most valuable areas must be protected from further logging. They produced detailed reports clearly expressing professional concern about NZFS management policy for these forests.

The problem was that the concept of attaching value to natural resources was and is famously controversial, because it depends so much on the prior assumptions of the valuer. The need for semi-objective and partially numerical valuation systems was clear from the start.

That requires some means of comparing the costs and benefits of alternative strategies in the same terms. Christoph Imboden, then with NZWS, attempted to develop one for New Zealand [8]. He proposed a scale of wildlife value categories defined as in Box 9.1, and mapped them across the surviving forests of the Hauhungaroa and Rangitoto Ranges. By the time Imboden's valuation map was presented to the Taupo seminar of 1978 (Fig. 9.1), a large swathe

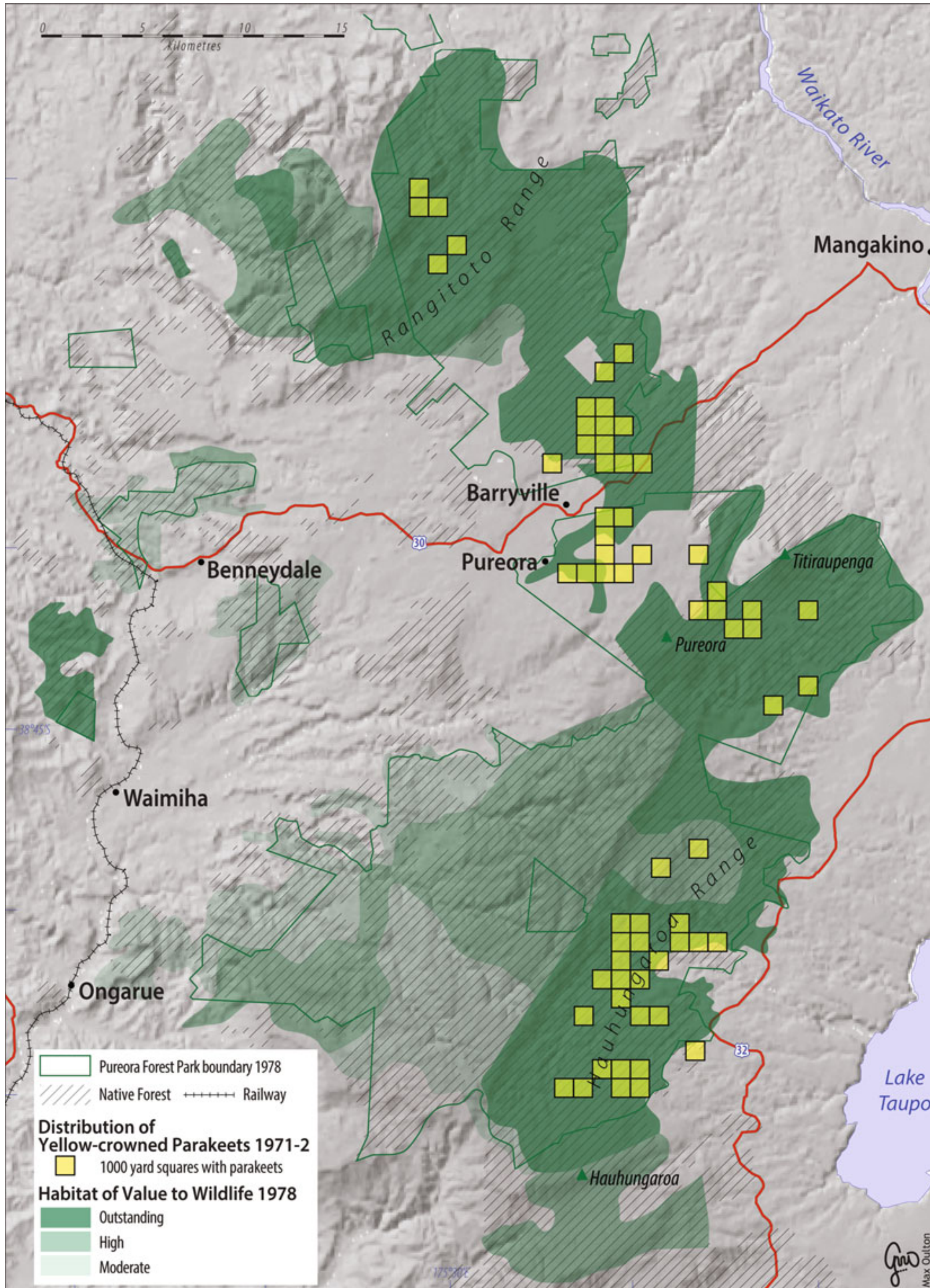

Fig. 9.1 Distribution of yellow-crowned parakeets in the west Taupo forests in 1000-yard squares surveyed by the NZ Wildlife Service in 1971–1972, superimposed on a map of Imboden's habitat valuation categories of 1978 as applied to the same areas and presented to the Taupo seminar. Note that in the years between the survey and the seminar, a large area of formerly continuous forest of outstanding value in the Pikiariki Road area east of Pureora, known to support parakeets (and kokako), was clearfelled and planted in pines. *Redrawn by Max Oulton from Crook (1973) and Imboden (1978: Fig. 5)*

of high-value forest that had been occupied by yellow-crowned parakeets in 1971/72 was already gone. How did that happen?

Box 9.1 Imboden's Valuation Scale for Wildlife Habitats [8]

Outstanding:

Presence of an endangered species listed in the Red Data Book of IUCN;

Presence of an isolated viable population of an endemic species with restricted distribution and limited abundance;

A largely unmodified habitat type not represented elsewhere to the same extent and large enough to support self-sustaining populations of all plant and animal species natural to this community.

High:

Presence of an uncommon, discontinuously distributed species not adequately and safely represented elsewhere in the region;

Presence of a species that has been significantly reduced in abundance and distribution elsewhere by human-induced habitat change;

A large example of a relatively unmodified habitat typical of the region and much reduced elsewhere.

Moderate:

Areas supporting good numbers of common wildlife species typical of the region;

All forest and wetland habitats not otherwise classified.

Imboden anticipated criticism of the broad definition of "moderate" value by pointing out that, because such huge areas of native forest and wetland have already been lost, *all* surviving remnants are valuable to some extent, so there is no need to add a further category for "low" value.

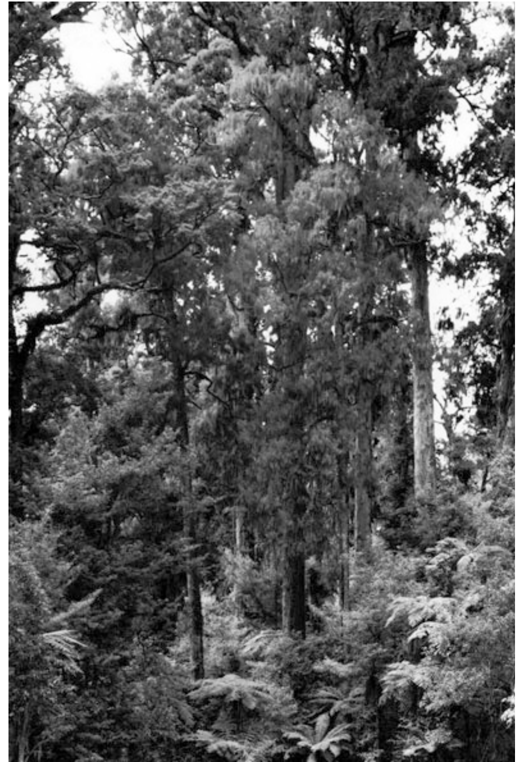

Fig. 9.2 An example of forest of outstanding value, in an outlier in the Ranginui Road area. It had been scheduled for clearfelling, but was eventually reserved as part of the Waipapa Ecological Area. C*rown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer unknown*

NZFS was sympathetic to the concept of "ecological areas" (EAs, proposed by John Nicholls of Forest Research Institute, FRI), and partially accepted the factually supported recommendations NZWS had made to NZFS in 1971. NZWS argued for the prohibition of logging in three areas of outstanding wildlife habitat (two in the Ranginui Road area (Fig. 9.2) and one on Pikiariki Road) that should be reserved as EAs.

The problem for NZFS was that the three areas contained about 734,000 m^3 of timber out of the total of 1.07 million m^3 available in the forest, and ruling them out would leave a deficit of 136,000 m^3 [14] short of the total required to meet the two existing 1968 and 1970 logging contracts described in Chap. 7.

The sticking point concerned how such large areas could be protected in the Pureora forest in relation to national demands for native timber and to the current NZFS logging contracts. NZFS informed NZWS that all three could not be reserved without further information on the importance of each of the three areas to the survival of the kokako.

Late in 1972, NZWS supplied more information, suggesting that the Ranginui Road block was

the most significant, so it was extended and set aside as the Waipapa EA. In the Pikiariki Rd area, logging had already started, and in order to meet commitments, NZFS required it to continue. An Ecological Area was eventually established in the Pikiariki area, but not until much later, and even then, it was much smaller than the ideal, and its irregular shape made it very vulnerable to wind damage [15].

Then as now, proposals in favour of "non-profitable" conservation land uses (for anything other than for protection of soil and water) could make progress only via hard bargaining and painful compromises. The NZFS officer then in charge at Pureora, Darbie Perston, commented in his 1972/73 report:

> For the first time, considerations affecting logging have been other than economic…Environmental protection, though irksome, will pay dividends and we must learn to modify our practices to conform to them [31].

NZWS welcomed the proposed Waipapa reserve, though not without pointing out how much more could be achieved if those reserves were made much larger. Imboden even proposed that the west Taupo forests as a whole be given IUCN Biosphere Reserve status, so providing New Zealand's contribution to a UNESCO programme creating representative conservation areas in all 193 of the earth's biogeographical provinces [8]. The idea was supported by the Auckland branch of the United Nations Association, but regrettably, it was too far ahead of its time, and now it is too late.

By contrast, a vocal non-Government conservation pressure group, the Native Forests Action Council (NFAC, formed in 1975) was adamant that the proposed Waipapa EA was an inadequate "token sample of the broad vegetation type represented by the once-extensive mixed podocarp rainforests…the stage has now been reached when all milling in virgin forest …should cease" [16]. NZFS could not agree at the time, although it was forced to change its policy later.

NFAC stimulated much public concern throughout the 1970s about conservation generally, protection of forests, and especially the survival of native birds in logged areas. The kokako aroused this concern far more than any other bird, for reasons clearly explained by Sir Charles Fleming, at the time of the launch of the NFAC campaign to save the remaining west Taupo forests [5].

> Next to the kiwi, the kokako is the most ancient and interesting bird on the mainland…Along with the tuatara, the native frog and the now-extinct moa, these are the last relics of the ancient time when New Zealand was part of the southern hemisphere continent, Gondwanaland…Most of the things we have thought of as our national culture, such as rugby football, have been imported from overseas. But our feeling for the bush-clad range behind the place where we were brought up is much more formative of us than the derived culture.

The Reasoned Case for Stopping the Logging

By 1974, the determined attempts by NZWS and others to halt logging in the giant totara stands in the Pikiariki area of Pureora forest had failed, but the general public was becoming more aware of these and the rest of New Zealand's dwindling native forest resources. Visits to Pureora by conservation groups and individuals, keen to see the situation for themselves, were becoming more frequent [31].

Scientists pointed out that the decline of kokako was clearly correlated with the reduction and fragmentation of forest area. The Pureora population was one of the largest remaining, yet NZFS agreed to protect only part of the Waipapa area, and refused to halt logging of other large areas of its core habitat. This combination of high iconic value, well-known and extreme but manageable threat, and great beauty was enough to trigger a powerful public reaction against what was perceived as heartless official intransigence.

Needless to say, the reality was far more complex than that. Some of the bitter complaints against NZFS management were quite wrong and unjustified, and many individual NZFS staff were the very opposite of heartless, but the public movement soon became unstoppable.

The 1978 Protests

Since reason had failed, more direct action was needed. It arrived in early 1977 in the form of Auckland-based conservation activist, Stephen King. King had been a passionate advocate of protection for native forests and Maori language since childhood, and for the next couple of years he was a well-known and controversial figure in the news media, instantly recognisable by his long hair and bare feet.

King was chair of the Auckland Branch of NFAC, which had been systematically identifying the best remaining North Island podocarp forests and visiting them. At Pureora he described the vista beyond the unlogged vegetation strip, left along the road edge to conceal the logging that was going on behind it (Fig. 9.3).

> As far as I could see was wasteland – smashed tree stumps, some 8-10 feet in diameter, broken branches, churned earth. Flocks of kaka were screeching in protest, and from the few remaining totara still standing in that raped landscape the song of the kokako poured out like a great lament mourning the fate of the huia, mourning the desecration of their ancient home [1: 46–47].

King did not simply stop at descriptive reporting, and he was not alone. He also got together a team of a dozen colleagues to plan what to do if reason could not prevail. NZFS used comparable tactics, based on the threat to the lives of the local community and on how they would mourn their lost jobs.

That was just the sort of controversy most loved by the news media. In response, on 17 May 1977 a camera crew and reporter from TV2 filmed a backgrounder on selection logging, plus a visit to Pikiariki and Tony Beveridge's forest plots. Such intense adversarial debates are not always conducted on reasonable grounds, then or now.

A high-level delegation from RFBPS followed on 12 August 1977, including Tony Ellis (President), Dave Collingwood (Conservation Officer), and representatives from the Waikato and Taumarunui branches [31].

Fig. 9.3 Inspecting the result of logging the forest of outstanding value in the Pikiariki Road area. The logging debris is drying out ready for burning. Left to right: FRI scientist John Herbert, NZFS District Forester Erle Robinson, FRI scientist Tony Beveridge. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (February 1975). Photographer unknown*

Late in 1977 King and NFAC prepared a detailed, scholarly 100-page parliamentary submission and presented it to the Minister of Forests, Venn Young, seeking a stop to the logging and burning of the last area of unprotected forest at Pikiariki. They emphasised that this area supported a unique forest association including giant totara, which had previously been identified by NZWS as of especially high wildlife value (Fig. 9.1). They argued that Pureora offered the last outstanding opportunity for a mainland wildlife sanctuary including some of the most distinctive life forms of the pre-European New Zealand rainforest, and a good population of kokako in an unlogged habitat [16]. NZFS ignored the submission.

The Minister's refusal to stop the logging in response to this request was, to him and to the NZFS bosses and senior scientists advising him and to the government behind them all, simply reasonable: NZFS was bound by two rigid commercial contracts (Chap. 7), legally valid until 1983 and 1985. The NZFS position would be explained, he announced, and the various options could be discussed, at a seminar in Taupo in March 1978.

To conservation groups, his refusal was disappointing and unreasonable. Logging in the nominated areas around the giant totara would not be stopped before the proposed seminar. The giant totara themselves might not be cut down, but removing the trees around them, crushing their roots with heavy machinery, and burning the remains before re-planting in radiata pines (Fig. 9.4) would cause damage that would by then be irreparable [32].

After the urgent appeals put up by RFBPS and NFAC to the Minister of Forests in 1977, plus a final last-minute request in January 1978, were all rejected by the Minister, conservation groups felt they had sufficient reason and support to take drastic action. The ensuing famous and well publicised protest campaign generated a huge controversy, which made rational negotiation both more necessary and also more difficult.

Meanwhile back in the bush, the whole argument had come as a considerable surprise to men

Fig. 9.4 After clearfelling and burning, near Pikiariki (1977). Three small pine seedlings can be seen in the foreground, planted in the ashes. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer unknown*

who worked every day in the forest and almost never saw a kokako, and to their bosses who saw their job as conserving the forest, i.e., managing it for *future use* [31]. The old hands like Buster Seager and Harry Bunn commented later that they never knew much about kokako when they worked in the bush, and could not identify one if they saw it by chance. They all knew and commented on the flocks of kaka and pigeons they often saw, and they knew the tui and lots of other birds, but the few who ever saw a kokako had trouble identifying it.

Tony Beveridge tells a story about Jack Fyffe who, in "one of his amiable moments in our shared field room, gave me an accurate description of an unusual bird seen near the logging gang on the slopes of Pureora Mountain; it could only have been a kokako. Jack was quite excited". Among very few written records that survive is a File Note written by Bill Drower in April 1968, describing a falcon attacking and killing a bird he did not recognise. Only much later, when the controversy ensured that pictures of kokako appeared in the newspapers, did he realise what he had seen.

Jack Walker, OC at the time, admitted that he could not understand what had triggered off the protests on his particular patch, considering there were other forests where the same kind of logging was going on and which had never attracted so much attention. Jack and many NZFS staff of his generation did not think much about rare birds, and he was not alerted by the increasing number of NFAC visitors because he had never worried too much about who was entering the forest. There was a permit system that was not rigidly enforced, in part because NZFS staff knew all the regular hunters and had many other problems to think about. So it is not surprising that they saw the whole controversy as being mainly about the threat to their livelihoods.

Crunchpoint: Sitting in the Tree Tops

Logging in the Pikiariki block was due to start again after the holiday break on Monday 16 January 1978. The issue featured on radio and TV on January 9, and attracted the attention of yet more high-profile visitors. On January 11 Ian Shearer, National MP for Hamilton East and his wife; Tony Ellis, President of RFBPS and his wife; Stewart Gray, member of Waikato NFAC and his wife; Ian Prior, president of ECO (an association of NZ environmental groups) and his wife; and NZFS staff Ossie Kirk (District Ranger at Te Kuiti), Erle Robinson (District Forester Te Kuiti) and Dave Yanko (2iC at Pureora), all came to inspect the ancient totara (reputedly 1000 years old, but probably more like 600–700 years) that were supposedly being felled. Shearer was himself a member of NFAC, and had a long history of criticising his own party's forestry policies [27] because, as he liked to say, he was an environmentalist before he became a politician.

NFAC leaders pointed out to the visitors that the logging area included the last significant area of 2 m plus diameter totara in public ownership and the largest surviving; some were trees equal in significance to the famous Tane Mahuta kauri of Waipoua Forest in Northland. NZFS were unmoved. The Assistant Conservator of Forests, Auckland, David Black, had met King on site in October 1977, but could not see what the fuss was about. These were just hollow old trees, he said—"a prevailing attitude among foresters who write off hollow trees as if they were useless", replied Stephen King. Black saw the clearfelling and conversion to exotics as an improvement of land use. "New Zealand is too small a country to have land lying idle" were his words. To which Stephen King replied that "by the same logic the Auckland Town Hall should be put to productive use and converted to a warehouse and the golf paddocks in Auckland should be ploughed up to grow spuds" [9].

Black was not alone in his opinion—it was the common attitude among foresters whose normal culture at the time, understandably, concentrated on producing timber rather than on the life of the whole forest community. Much later, Stephen King, speaking at a 1980s public meeting of 400 in Auckland at which NZFS managers were present, likened the timber community's disdain for hollow trees to writing off anyone with grey hair in a human community [9]. It was when trees reached the hollow stage that they entered

middle age and began to contribute the most to their arboreal society, which we call an ecosystem. By contrast, in a forester's ideal world everyone with a sign of grey hair is removed. That's fine for timber cropping models, he said, but disastrous for a balanced ecosystem or a protected heritage forest.

Such different viewpoints (jobs versus birds, or human benefit versus natural processes, or more broadly, exploitation versus protection) are certainly not recent or confined to New Zealand—and nor have they disappeared since. Decades previously, a similar "yawning ideological chasm" separated the attitudes of pioneering Oxford ecologist Charles Elton from those of the foresters charged with managing Elton's famous study area, Wytham Woods. The conflicts of interests between foresters aiming to remove all unhealthy trees and ecologists interested in the rich wildlife of decaying timber were never far from the surface for at least 40 years of Wytham's history [26: 201]. A decade after Pureora, the conflict between logging and wildlife was fought out again in the old-growth forests of the Pacific northwestern states of the US. Doak [4] used population models to predict the effect of logging on the survival of the northern spotted owl, and concluded that the proposed US Forest Service plan would extinguish the owls.

Some of the Maori bushmen working in the forest were caught between these two quite different perspectives. In one area scheduled for clearfelling, Maori crosscutters assigned to fell about 50 huge ancient totara were anxious to leave them standing because they were rangatira (noble), and viewed in Maori tradition as tupuna (ancestors) (Chap. 3). The bushmen were not alone: they had the support of local Maori kuia (elder) Martha Hepi and the whanau (community) who were employed at the sawmill. But, as employees of the Forest Service, the bushmen were ordered to go back and cut the big trees down. Either they did it, or they lost their jobs and income for their families [9].

To be fair, the apparently intransigent attitude of NZFS senior managers was not because they did not realize that many old totara are hollow, but simply that the South Block forest in question was scheduled for clearfelling and conversion to exotics. Most men who had worked for decades in the forests developed a highly educated eye for a tree. A story is told about Francis Carter, co-founder of the Carter Holt Harvey empire,

> …when experts were arguing over how many board feet of timber there might be in a giant totara that had been discovered in the Pouakani Block… 130 feet tall and 37 feet round at breast height. Francis quietly walked around it, looked up at the branches in its head and studied its base. "There's no timber in it", he pronounced. "It's hollow, full of kaekak [honeycomb timber]. Leave it to the pigeons and posterity" [23: 50].

Ironically, years later it was Carter's own company, then run by Francis' son Alwyn and co-owner of Pureora Sawmill Ltd, that was insisting on clearfelling the giant totara of Pureroa and the surrounding rimu, matai, miro and kahikatea. The argument by this stage was more about authority, exotic conversion and contracts than about the native forest. One un-named NZFS officer was reported to have said privately that "for the amount of timber involved in the southern part of the forest, the department [NZFS] could well have left the native trees alone" [12].

On Saturday 14 January 1978, a group of more than 100 NFAC members and supporters from Auckland, the Waikato and Bay of Plenty arrived in two busloads (Fig. 9.5), accompanied by fascinated reporters and TV crews from both news channels [33]. On the same day, the Director-General of Forests Malcolm Conway was reported as saying that any physical action by NFAC would be "ill-advised", adding that "they don't worry me, the logging would go ahead no matter what NFAC tried to do", because it was being done under legally binding contracts [27]. Protest action could affect neither NZFS's obligation to fulfil its contracts, nor save future forests, he said, since no similar contracts would ever be let because NZFS's former clearfelling policy had now been phased out. And, he probably added under his breath, NZFS senior managers don't like being told what to do by outsiders.

Instead of arguing, NFAC spent the weekend planting 100 native tree seedlings across the

Fig. 9.5 Native Forest Action Council (NFAC) protesters returning to their bus along Bismarck Road, January 1978. *Graeme Reinhardt*

access road, but two days later NZFS staff uplifted them and transplanted them out of the way.

Last-ditch efforts to avert a confrontation continued. On the day the timber crews went back to work (16 January), Internal Affairs staff tried to find someone to rescue the kokako before the logging reached them [28], and their Minister Allan Highet criticised Venn Young for not stopping it; Gwenny Davis, national president of NFAC, tried again to persuade Young to change his mind; nothing worked.

On 18 January Stephen King and his brother and several companions packed enough food for a month, climbed two of the giant totara in the Pikiariki Road area near where logging was about to start, and camped on platforms among the branches (Fig. 9.6). NFAC could not have people in every tree at risk, but the idea was to hide up there so well that the loggers could not see which trees were occupied, and therefore could not log any of them [9].

> The protest …proved irresistible to the media and ultimately brought New Zealand…to an awareness of the fragile and growing scarcity of these once-great forests. Stephen King… padded knowledgeably through the forest, imitating kokako and speaking both Maori and English… National attention was rivetted in 1978 by an act of desperate imagining and audacious theatre, scripted as if for television [34: 187].

Most NFAC supporters knew nothing of the protest before it took place, because success depended on total surprise, so none of the 80 members who visited the forest with the sitting group three days before the protest had any idea the tree top protest was being planned. Not even the whole NFAC committee knew, only those involved. They had tried every other avenue without success, and the final decision was made to proceed just three days in advance.

The tree-sitters whistled to each other as the crews began to start up their saws, but the loggers could not tell where the whistles were coming from. Dave Yanko looked hard, and swore that Stephen King was not there. The sitters revealed themselves only to reporters willing to interview them and pass their message on to the public.

The Prime Minister, Robert Muldoon, was flooded with telegrams from conservationists nation-wide, but, unwilling to allow a "young

Fig. 9.6 One of the tree platforms built high in an ancient totara by NFAC activists. They were based on pallets, and accessed by advanced abseiling gear. *Crown Copyright, Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai. Photographer unknown*

rabble" of protesters to get in the way of legitimate milling work, ordered them to leave. He could not enforce his order because King and his party had a permit for 14 people to camp in the forest for the month of January, so they had a legitimate reason to be there. They had been there for days already, and were refusing to leave until they got an assurance from the Minister of Forests Venn Young that the Pikiariki block would be saved. Young was out of touch, visiting the subantarctic Auckland Islands [11].

Undeterred by Muldoon's anger, a small group of protesters confronted a group of forestry workers in the forest. Police were informed, but did nothing. King declined an invitation to meet Jack Walker (the NZFS OC for Pureora), in case he took the opportunity to revoke the permit. The Timber Worker's Union sent Hamilton branch secretary Cliff Wall to make sure "these clowns" were not putting union members' lives at risk. Tempers frayed, and newspaper editorials in the main metropolitan papers added fuel to the uproar.

Muldoon's ultimatum was ignored, and cutting of the matai, rimu and kahikatea around the giant totara continued. His stance was significantly weakened by the public response when it emerged that NZFS knew very well that they were felling and burning an area that had been identified by NZWS as prime kokako habitat [1]. A door-to-door survey in Muldoon's own electorate the previous year had shown >90 % support for the Maruia Declaration petition.

Stephen King and his companions continued to sit in their perches. King's younger brother stayed steadfast in a tree just 10 m from two 30 m rimu being prepared for felling by Dave Yanko's logging gang without making himself known until after they had cut one tree. If he had shown himself before they cut the tree down, they would have simply moved and continued logging [29]. His courage shook the confidence of the logging gang and of NZFS.

OC Jack Walker tried to remain level-headed amid the fuss, but he remembered being well aware that "the silly bastards could have got killed… I guess we would have had to accept responsibility". He was often tempted to "lock them up in a bag and hang them on a fence" [31]. Local meetings went round in circles, and forestry staff felt they were being left to struggle through the crisis without much support. NFAC's presence was reinforced over the weekend by more supporters from Rotorua and Hamilton.

NZFS field staff realised that it wasn't possible to continue logging in the Pikiariki block without endangering human life [29]. So felling operations were transferred to the North Block, to ensure that NZFS's commitment to the Barryville mill's 15-year logging contract could be met. Dave Yanko said that they were planning to move there anyway and were just about ready to go, so from his point of view, the protests had done nothing at all to change NZFS' existing plans. For NFAC, that was not enough, so the tree-sitters sat tight.

In the absence of his Minister, Malcolm Conway, the increasingly embattled Director General of NZFS needed a semi-official dignified retreat.

On Sunday 22 January Conway announced a temporary pause in logging, out of concerns for the safety both of the protesters and of his own NZFS staff. Others were less sympathetic to the protesters. Wright [33: 106] quotes a comment made later by one timber man:

> When this bloke first climbed into the tree I thought he was a nutter. In view of what has happened since I wish I'd have cut the b—tree down with him in it.

The temporary halt did not stop the debate—it merely pushed the issue on to the next question, whether logging should be resumed. Martha Hepi and the Maori community living in Maraeroa supported the protesters arguing for long-term protection for their forest. With the help of the Tuwharetoa elders of the Mangakino marae, they collectively sent a telegram to Muldoon asking him to stop the logging for good [12]. They suggested that exotic timber be sent to the mill, a solution that had been used in the case of a Northland forest to protect kauri in 1974 [22]. Their plea was ignored.

The wives of the Pureora workers weighed in on the other side. They too sent a telegram to Muldoon:

> We, the wives of forest workers at Pureora Forest, object most strongly to the protesters unlawfully in our Forest. They are law-breakers and should be treated as such. We feel for our trees also, but to feed and clothe families are more important than 1000-year-old trees that are already rotten. We are 100 % behind [the request of] our staff and bushmen here to have the protesters removed and logging to continue as before. (Signed) J Walker, D Thackeray, J Hughes, J Reti, M. Anderson and 12 others [3].

Muldoon acknowledged the telegram, and assured the wives that their views had been noted.

Cabinet ministers were bombarded with telegrams, and at the Cabinet meeting on 24 January, the decision was made to confirm and extend Conway's ruling. Logging in the Pikiariki block was suspended until after the promised forestry seminar in Taupo in March.

King and his companions came down from the trees. They were allowed to return on February 11 to collect their gear, under escort by Woodsman Sneath [31].

NFAC's action was the first treetop protest publicized internationally, and it was over quickly because the surprise was complete, the story irresistible to the media, the case was very strong, and there was a good army of people from the grass roots to politicians, government department leaders and scientists who were ready and prepared to speak up to support the protesters. The story has become well known to many environmental groups ever since, although fewer know that it had an ironic twist.

A month later, an NZFS burn-off destroyed 300 mature rimu trees in a riparian strip in the Pikiariki clearfelled area that had been protected by the tree-sitting action [30]. The fire spread into the crowns of some standing totara, and they had to be removed. "It didn't bring us any kudos…[but] we eventually did all the right things and got it out", commented Jack Walker. NZFS, embarrassed but not penitent, offered NFAC 25 ha to replant.

The Taupo Seminar

The seminar convened by NZFS at Taupo on 28–30 March 1978 was entitled *Management Proposals for State Forests of the Rangitoto and Hauhungaroa Ranges, Central North Island*. NZFS had previously held a similar seminar in Hokitika in 1974, to discuss the West Coast Beech Scheme (proposed in 1971: Chap. 6) so they had some idea of how to go about organising it, but this one was different.

NZFS staff had already been planning to hold a forestry seminar to consider the west Taupo forests to coincide with the completion of the massive King Country Land Use Study [20]. Nevertheless, the publicity surrounding the tree-sitting protests at Pureora forced the Minister to ask NZFS to bring forward that plan at short notice.

The seminar was attended by 52 mostly invited delegates representing a wide range of interests. They started with a one day field trip on March 28 (escorted by Dave Yanko) to inspect the disputed areas first hand. Comprehensive field trip notes were provided both by NZFS

[19], and by local interests [24]. Then the delegates listened to and discussed two days of detailed papers. The transcript of the seminar includes drafts of all the papers presented [18].

The structure of the programme and the affiliations of the speakers were affected, to a surprising degree, by history. Pureora Mountain is close to the geographic centre of the North Island (Fig. 0.1 in Preface), and has always been a natural boundary marker for different landholdings extending in all directions. Pureora Forest Park stands astride territorial boundaries dating back to Maori times, when the ancestral lands of three major tribal groupings met near there (Fig. 3.1), and it was natural that European administrative boundaries should follow suit. These local arrangements also simplified the differences between the Maori owners of the land in the way they chose to subdivide it for lease or sale, and between provinces in the geographical origins and development of road and rail links.

The same radial arrangement of boundaries persisted into the organisation of the timber contracts controlled by three different Forest Service Conservancies delivering timber to mills in six State Forests (Fig. 9.7). The three Conservancies had always managed their sectors of the west Taupo forests more or less independently. So, SF 96 Pureora (25,385 ha), SF 97 Hurakia (22,895 ha) and SF 92 Wharepuhunga (1245 ha) were in the Auckland Conservancy, and logs extracted from them went northwest to Auckland by rail from Mangapehi. SF 98 Tihoi (20,965 ha) was in the Rotorua Conservancy, and the logs went northeast to Rotorua and Putaruru by truck. SF 121 Taringamotu (6013 ha) and SF 112 Waituhi (3656 ha) were in the Wellington Conservancy, and the logs went south and southwest to Taranaki and Wellington by rail via Taumarunui [18, 21]. Hence, the 85,000 ha of State Forests under consideration at the seminar included land administered by all three NZFS Conservancies in the North Island.

The seminar was opened by the three NZFS Forest Conservators (Gavin Molloy, Auckland; John Rockell, Wellington; and John Ure, Rotorua). They started off by describing the areas for which they were responsible and summarising their past management record. Logging of podocarps in Pureora Forest and replanting with exotic species or release for farming had had a long history, as part of the long-term Pureora Working Circle plan (Chap. 7). Clearfelling and conversion to exotics had already ceased in North Pureora in the Okahukura Valley, giving way to partial logging in 1975. In the South Block the last clearfelling and conversion was done near Pikiariki Ecological Area in September 1977 [14], but selection logging was still going on.

Then two senior foresters (David Field, Rotorua and Erle Robinson, Te Kuiti) outlined the management proposals that were the cause of all the debate [6]. They described how the complex stands of remaining indigenous forests at Pureora had been zoned for different forms of management. They summarised five possible options for the future, and the consequences of each option for the existing logging contracts (Box 9.2).

Box 9.2 Management Options for the Remaining Unlogged Forest

These are the figures estimated by NZFS and given to the Taupo seminar on the future of Pureora in March 1978. The surplus/deficit figures refer to how much timber would be produced by each option in relation to the existing timber contracts [6].

Option	Strategy	Sawlog volume (m^3)	
		Available	Surplus/deficit
A	Clearfell all unlogged forest	882,000	+586,000
B	Selectively log all unlogged forest	302,000	+6000
C	Clearfell outside EAs	313,000	+17,000
D	Selectively log outside EAs	106,000	−190,000
E	Stop logging	0	−296,000

Excluding the exotic plantations, about two thirds of the 85,000 ha under discussion was already zoned for reservation in one form or

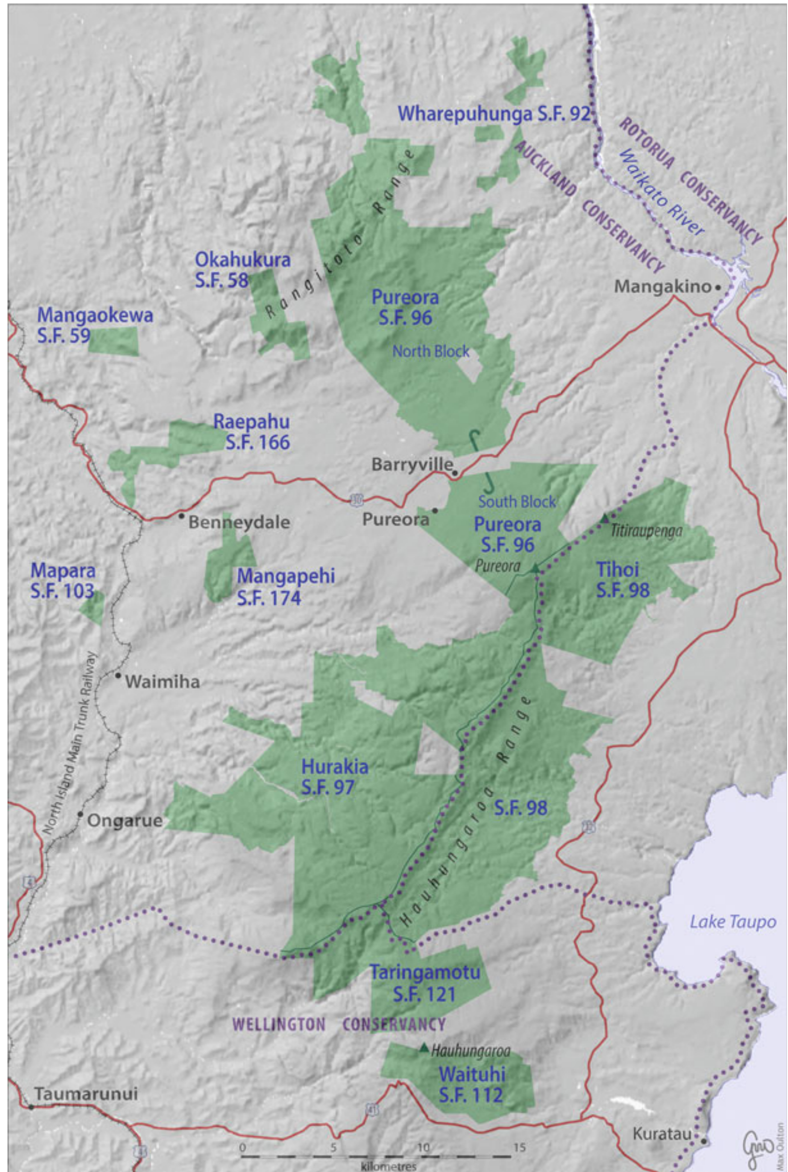

Fig. 9.7 Locations and numbers of the state forests under consideration at the Taupo Seminar, plus others nearby that were not considered. The plan for Pureora Forest Park included six State Forests formerly managed independently under three separate NZFS Conservancies. *Redrawn by Max Oulton from Molloy et al. (1978)*

another. Over the remaining third, the option favoured by NZFS would allow extraction of a vastly reduced selective harvest of timber over about 40 years.

NZFS managers were not used to having to justify their decisions to such a public and critical audience, but this time they had no option. They complied, providing figures to show that a decision to stop all logging immediately would leave NZFS short by 296,000 m^3 on delivering its timber commitments to the saw mills holding current contracts. No doubt they hoped that this patient and logical explanation would satisfy any reasonable critics.

The rest of the seminar programme was provided by a roll-call of virtually all the prominent scientists and foresters working in forest management and conservation at the time. Everyone

was well aware of the intense public interest and scrutiny of their work, and of the amount of attention being focussed on the seminar by journalists and activists.

Most of those journalists and activists knew almost nothing about the technical business of forestry, or that NZFS had a long history of concern to slow down the rate of milling in native forests (Chap. 6), or that the Pureora project had been conceived by NZFS almost 40 years previously as a carefully managed plan to protect the future of the forests and the people who depended on them (Chap. 7).

A set of eight discussion papers followed, grouped under the general heading of "Forest Values". They included descriptions of forest composition and ecology (John Nicholls, John Herbert); hydrology (Colin O'Loughlin), wildlife (Christoph Imboden), recreation (Russell Dale), proposed reserves (John Nicholls, John Herbert), current and potential use of timber (John Vaney, Laurie Gibson), production forestry (David Field, Erle Robinson) and selective logging (Tony Beveridge, John Herbert) [17]. Then came an interim report on an unfinished study of the social impact of any reduction in logging at Pureora from the Business Development Centre, University of Otago, summarising a fuller account published a few months later [7].

Andy Kirkland (Assistant DG of Forests) contributed a 13-page summing up of the proceedings, ending with the memorable comment:

> I think…the differences in viewpoint that we have heard are essentially differences in philosophy… the mainspring of the conservationists' attitude to the forests is something that may be diminishing in other sectors of society – a reverence for the aged and the virgin [13].

Kirkland made very plain which was the option preferred by NZFS. It believed that the Government's recently revised management policy (Chap. 6) was working, and that there was room for both reservation and production in the west Taupo forests. He saw no reason to abort the policy prematurely; the juxtaposition of modified and unmodified forests could well be the best strategy, and it should be given a chance to prove itself.

Outside the reserved areas, he emphasised, clearfelling had largely ceased already; the issue was whether *selection* logging should continue as proposed in order to meet demands for high quality timber, such as rimu for furniture making and totara for Maori carvers, and to fulfill the existing logging contracts that guaranteed supply to timber companies in Barryville and Te Kuiti (Chap. 7). Replanting with native species was part of this policy, which was intended to maintain long-term sustainability of the indigenous timber resource.

The seminar ended with a final address by DG of Forests Malcolm Conway, emphasising his continuing support of selection logging, and then an invitation from the Minister of Forests Venn Young for public submissions on the NZFS proposals. Conway did not contribute a written record of his statement to the official transcript, but copies of the formal papers were lodged in NZFS offices and public libraries throughout the country. The debate surrounding them went on for years.

In Kirkland's last annual report for NZFS in 1985, he summarised the key question as "whether integration or separation of the various state forest functions is preferable". This was essentially the same issue that had been studied and rejected by at least two committees since 1969 [25: 381]. New answers to it were waiting just around the corner (Chap. 11).

References

1. Barrington, J. (1995). Profile: Stephen King. Forest and Bird, February 46–47.
2. Crook, I. G. (1973). Forest survey. Wildlife—A Review, 4, 37–41.
3. Department of Conservation. Archives. Hamilton: Department of Conservation.
4. Doak, D. (1989). Spotted owls and old growth logging in the Pacific northwest. Conservation Biology, 3, 389–396.
5. Evening Post, 11 April 1977.
6. Field, D. A., & Robinson, E. D. (1978). Management proposals for state forests of the Hauhungaroa-Rangitoto ranges [*Transcript of the Taupo seminar*]. Wellington: New Zealand Forest Service.
7. Higham, J. R. S., & Menzies, P. (1978). Social and economic impact of indigenous forestry in the Pureora area. Dunedin: Otago Business Development Centre.

8. Imboden, C. (1978). Wildlife values and wildlife conservation in the Hauhungaroa and Rangitoto ranges [*Transcript of the Taupo seminar*]. Wellington: New Zealand Forest Service
9. King, S. (2013). Personal communication.
10. King, M. (2007). The Penguin history of New Zealand illustrated. Auckland: Penguin Books.
11. King Country Chronicle, 10 January 1978.
12. King Country Chronicle, 24 January 1978.
13. Kirkland, A. (1978). Summary of information from seminar papers and discussion [*Transcript of the Taupo seminar*]. Welllington: New Zealand Forest Service.
14. Molloy, G. J., Rockell, J. D., & Ure, J. (1978). Introduction to the state forests of the Rangitoto and Hauhungaroa ranges [*Transcript of the Taupo seminar*]. Wellington: New Zealand Forest Service.
15. Murphy, B. (1984). Pikiariki ecological area, its pattern, processes and management. BForSc thesis, University of Canterbury.
16. Native Forests Action Council (1977). The Podocarp Rainforests of Pureora. Nelson: Native Forests Action Council (NZ).
17. New Zealand Forest Service (1977). Management policy for New Zealand's indigenous state forests. Wellington: New Zealand Forest Service.
18. New Zealand Forest Service (1978). Management proposals for state forests of the Rangitoto and Hauhungaroa ranges, Central North Island [*Transcript of the Taupo seminar*]. Wellington: New Zealand Forest Service.
19. New Zealand Forest Service (1978). West Taupo field trip notes. 28.3.78. Taupo: New Zealand Forest Service.
20. New Zealand Forest Service (1978). Submissions on the west Taupo state forests. Wellington: New Zealand Forest Service.
21. New Zealand Forest Service (1980). Pureora state forest park management plan. Auckland: New Zealand Forest Service, Auckland Conservancy.
22. Orwin, J. (2004). Kauri: Witness to a nation's history. Auckland: New Holland.
23. Parker, S. (2000). Cutting edge: The Carter-Holt-Harvey story. Auckland: Viking Penguin.
24. Pureora Community Council (1981). Submission to King Country regional management plan. Pureora: Pureora Community Council.
25. Roche, M. (1990). History of forestry. Wellington: New Zealand Forestry Corporation Ltd
26. Savill, P. S., Perrins, C. M., Kirby, K. J., & Fisher, N. (Eds.) (2010). Wytham woods: Oxford's Ecological Laboratory. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
27. Waikato Times, 14 January 1978.
28. Waikato Times, 16 January 1978.
29. Waikato Times, 20 January 1978.
30. Waikato Times, 24 February 1978.
31. Wilkes, O., Gaukrodger, J., & Ritchie, N. (2011). Chronology of Pureora. Hamilton: Department of Conservation.
32. Wilson, R. (1982). From Manapouri to Aramoana: The battle for New Zealand's environment. Auckland: Earthworks Press.
33. Wright, L. W. (1980). Decision making and the logging industry: An example from New Zealand. Biological Conservation, 18, 101–115.
34. Young, D. (2004). Our islands, our selves. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.