

IN ALL SINCERITY

Before Captain Sanderson inspired his fellow enthusiasts to unite and form the Native Bird Protection Society in 1923 (to become the Forest and Bird Protection Society in 1934) there were others who knew that many factors were operating to threaten the very existence of our native birds and forests, but it was left to Captain Sanderson to do something about it. A keen observer, he was a practical thinker, endowed with more than the usual courage. He saw clearly the parlous condition of our birds and forests and he realised that someone had to do something about it. At considerable sacrifice and in spite of opposition he determined to devote the rest of his life to organising protection for the remnants of our indigenous forests and birds.

Today the Society is carrying on the work so ably commenced by him, and although it is still experiencing opposition there is evidence that our work is bearing fruit. A strong body of informed public opinion is being built up in support of our efforts, and, notwithstanding the industrial complexes and somewhat insidious influences of other present-day things and preoccupations, there appears to be an awakening of public opinion which ultimately will become too strong and too insistent to be ignored. We know that a very large proportion of citizens sympathise with our efforts, but unfortunately they are not vocal. It is left to the Society to take action, otherwise it could be a case of trying to save too little—too late.

During the thirty-seven years of the Society's existence important progress has taken place: a special section of the Department of Internal Affairs has been set up to deal with wildlife problems and the section has the assistance of a Government-sponsored fauna-advisory council, the Forest Service has been formed and is now a very important department of State staffed by competent and enthusiastic officers, a Soils Erosion and Rivers Control Council vested with considerable power is functioning under expert control, a consolidated National Parks Act came into force in 1953 and now controls nine parks, the rabbit menace has been dealt with and the Rabbit Destruction Council appears to have performed a very satisfactory job. Protection has been removed from other important animal pests and the means for eradicating these is constantly under review. Waipoua Kauri Forest has been created a reserve for all time, and a ten-year experiment is being conducted with the Tararua National Forest Park. All these and other measures form encouraging evidence of a realisation that conservation of our natural resources calls for action. Nevertheless, we should not let the foregoing lull us into a false sense of progress and well-being. A Government department can be staffed with keen intelligent expert personnel yet be rendered ineffective either by being starved of finance or by political interference or indifference. It is unfortunately true that any department of State can be only as effective as its political head permits it to be. It is, of course, right that major decisions should require the approval of the political head of the department concerned, but it is vital that decisions should not be over-long delayed and that these should be determined by what is right in the best interests of the people of today and of tomorrow. We like to think that Ministers give decisions they know to be right even if giving such decisions seem to impose a threat to their seat at the next election. The country needs such leaders, men who are completely sincere in their convictions and fearless in their determination to see that what is right is done because it is right, regardless of pressure from sectional interests, however powerful. The machinery for conservation of our natural resources is there; it is for the Ministers to see that it is not rendered ineffective by indifference or lack of support. How this is done will be judged by posterity, who will applaud and rejoice—or condemn and lament.

For ourselves, following in the footsteps of Captain Sanderson, we claim to act with the utmost sincerity in order to achieve the objectives of the Society. At the moment we are engaged with a number of problems some of which are fiercely criticised and opposed by those with other interests to serve; we are afraid neither of criticism nor of opposition, we do not even resent it as long as it is offered in good faith. On the other hand, we believe that we are entitled to the support of all those who believe as we do: that *our wonderful natural heritage is worth making an effort to save.*