

# The Wildlife Branch

## *History and Development*

The Wildlife Branch, one of the divisions of the Department of Internal Affairs, was established in 1945 by the late Sir Joseph Heenan. He considered that a special organisation should be set up to concentrate on wildlife problems in view of their increasing number and complexity.

A cadet joining the Department in 1927 would have read a controversy in the Press as to whether opossums were an asset or a pest, while a person poisoning them was liable to prosecution. Licences were needed to shoot deer, and antlers taken had to be tagged. "Something" was not right with the trout in Lake Taupo; so if times have changed at least one problem remains. Among the letters he despatched would be very formal acknowledgements of the monthly reports from Mr. Clouston, caretaker of the Goulard Downs sanctuary. These would be avidly read, telling as they did of another world far removed from the dark recesses of the old wooden Government Buildings. In Rotorua Mr. Moorehouse, the local conservator, with a few assistants presided over the destiny of the Rotorua and Taupo fisheries. In Wellington one senior official and one clerk gave part-time attention to a variety of correspondence dealing with wildlife matters.

From the early days of settlement the Colonial Secretary's office and then the Department had some responsibility for wildlife matters, but facts on which to base decisions were often very secondhand. At least by 1927 the Rotorua officers formed a nucleus of field staff dating from 1913, when the Department was instructed to administer the Taupo and Rotorua Lakes fisheries. Also by the 1920s successive directors of the Dominion Museum and able zoologists such as the late Professor H. B. Kirk were giving authoritative advice.

In 1930 public pressure led to the start of deer field work. Mr. G. F. Yerex, on a shoe-string budget in those depression years, organised hunting teams largely manned by high-country workers. Thirty years later the fine traditions they established still live on in the work of officers engaged in a variety of wildlife work. Difficulties were overcome with a resourcefulness later to be typified by the New Zealand soldier overseas.

**PROTECT  
NATIVE BIRDS**



*The wildlife of today is not ours  
to dispose of as we please,  
we have it in trust, we must  
account for it to those who  
come after. King George VI*

WILDLIFE BRANCH

A Wildlife notice. Using the same central motif and blue and white colour, notices of different design denote wildlife refuges, wildlife sanctuaries, and district boundaries.

Until 1939 field work remained centred in the Rotorua district and in the rugged deer country, at once part of New Zealand's charm and a main reason for many of our wildlife problems. The war greatly curtailed both activities but before they could be re-established the Department was instructed to form and administer the Southern Lakes Acclimatisation District. Such was the situation in late 1945 when Mr. Yerex and a handful of assistants, some recently returned from overseas, commenced building up a Wildlife Branch.

The Animals Protection and Game Act of 1922 required replacing and a long task ended in 1953 with the passing of the Wildlife Act. Closer liaison was soon established with the Freshwater Fisheries Section of the Marine Department. This ensured that full benefit was obtained from its research into trout