

# THE JUNIOR SECTION\*

*Compiled by Wellington Branch*

IN this article in our ecological series we visit an island—Kapiti bird sanctuary.

**H**AVE you ever looked at a little island and wanted to get there? What do you expect to see? What will be different from the land you are standing on? Perhaps we want to visit little islands because they seem to be little worlds of their own with their own birds and animals and plants living in a compact group. Islands are not always like this; in fact most have been so modified or altered by man that they bear little resemblance to the picture we see in our minds.

It is hard to imagine what the general landscape of our land looked like a thousand years ago, possibly covered in forests, perhaps recovering from an ash shower from an eruption at Tongariro or Ngauruhoe. Perhaps we find it easier to visualise a smaller area like an island—what do you think?

Most of New Zealand's off-shore islands have had a very chequered history since the Maori canoes and the later European settlers arrived, and many islands have unique and valuable economic advantages such as mutton-bird colonies or natural glass (obsidian) deposits, assets worth fighting for in the days when tribes made war and the victors quickly took the prizes.

Let us look at a particular island—Kapiti—seen in the distance by thousands of people every day as they commute to work in Wellington along the coastal highway.

It adds a lot of pleasure to a trip to know the history of the place you intend to visit, and fortunately the early writers gave good descriptions of Kapiti.

The account of Captain Cook's first voyage of discovery gives the first mention of Kapiti. He saw it on 14 January 1770, and when later noting that it was an easily recognisable landmark he called it Entry Island: "... pass Entry Island and soon come to Queen Charlotte Sound and Ship Cove, which is an ideal spot to careen a ship and give the crew a chance to recuperate".

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## Base for Te Rauparaha

A great Maori fighting chief called Te Rauparaha saw Kapiti's possibilities as a base for his tribe, and after a great migratory trek down from Raglan and Kawhia he captured the island and used it as his base to subdue all the neighbouring tribes. He leaves us his history of massacre and war.

The whalers came and set up camps and boiling-down works at Kapiti, and in its heyday in the mid 1830s there must have been scenes of great activity. Dieffenbach says that "in 1839 the produce of the establishments on these islands was 466 tons of oil and 30 tons of whalebone, obtained by twenty-three boats, eight of which belonged to Kapiti, eight from the little islands off Kapiti, and seven to two stations abreast of Mana Island". The whalers who lived on Tokomapuana Island, which is only about 2 acres in extent, must have been especially tough, as in southerly storms the island can hardly be seen for spray flying over it.

In 1897 the Government decided to declare the island a reserve for the preservation of native flora and fauna, and since 1923 the bush has slowly regenerated, providing a home and food for the birdlife. This is largely because Captain Sanderson, the founder of our own Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, gained his inspiration through looking at Kapiti from his home at Paekakariki, and working to restore the island in the early 1920s.

## Birds Galore

Let us take an imaginary trip to Kapiti Island as it is today. Landing on the beach at Rangatira, we walk up to the grassy picnic area. A cautious weka peers out of the shrubby cover and then boldly struts to meet us. In a spreading old ngaio tree a kaka looks sedately at us and, being very used to seeing visitors, hops down a convenient branch and looks for a peace offering from us—the invaders of his realm. A date is offered,