



Cuvier—An Island Restored

CUVIER ISLAND, lying in the outer Hauraki Gulf 25 miles east of Cape Colville, the northern extremity of the Coromandel Peninsula, has a history which would make it excellent material for a "before and after" advertisement.

WHEN officers of the New Zealand Wildlife Service, Department of Internal Affairs, first visited the "old" Cuvier in August 1953, overgrazing by heavy populations of feral goats in addition to domestic sheep and cattle, had seriously affected the vegetation. The North Island saddleback had disappeared—presumed exterminated by the large numbers of feral cats—and other birdlife was poor.

Today, however, the "new" Cuvier tells a vastly different story. After a decade of management this island reserve is now well on the way toward complete rehabilitation; the goats and cats are gone, which has allowed vigorous regeneration of vegetation, and the saddlebacks, which were reintroduced in 1968, are flourishing with other birdlife.

Little History Recorded

Little is recorded about the history of Cuvier Island. Though it was certainly inhabited by

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Maoris in 1824, when it was discovered by d'Urville and named after a famous French naturalist of that period, Maori lore supported by archaeological findings suggests that it could possibly have been inhabited discontinuously from an early date even before the fleet period migration of 1300 A.D.

The area of the island—Repanga to the natives—is 481 acres, of which 58 acres are lighthouse and radar beacon reserves and the remaining 423 acres are a flora and fauna reserve. The terrain is hilly, rising to 755 ft above sea level, and most of the coastline is cliffbound. Mixed coastal forest covers about 250 acres of the land, and several giant specimens of pohutukawa and puriri have managed to survive in spite of indications of widespread burning in pre-European times.

Heading illustration: A sea view of Cuvier Island. The erosion on steep coastal faces is due to overgrazing by feral goats and domestic stock. Wildlife Service photo by K. Westerskov.