

RAOU Fellow: Citation

At the Annual General Meeting on 25 May 1990 the Council's recommendation that Mr B.D. Bell be elected a Fellow was accepted unanimously.



BRIAN DOUGLAS BELL

Hunting, changed habitats and introduced plants and animals have forced many of New Zealand's native birds into extinction and left others teetering on the brink. However, innovative conservation action over the past two decades has pulled several species back from the edge. Brian Bell has played an influential role in virtually all these successful projects.

Brian grew up in the Marlborough and Canterbury districts of the South Island. Surrounded by hills, braided riverbeds, islands and rocky coasts, he soon became deeply interested in natural history. Seabirds and islands, both abundant in the nearby Marlborough Sounds and Cook Strait, especially fascinated him. These two fascinations have been a continuing theme throughout his professional life.

He moved to Wellington in March 1957 to join the New Zealand Wildlife Service. He remained with the Service, helping to shape its development and engineer many of its

achievements, until it was incorporated into the new Department of Conservation in April 1987. During all those 30 years Brian Bell was in charge of the conservation and management of protected species. Inevitably, much of his work focused on the considerable number of endemic birds facing extinction. Never keen to direct field operations from the comfort of an office desk, Brian took an active part in the bird conservation work, spending long periods away in remote places. His outstanding conservation achievements were recognised in 1984 with the award of the Queen's Service Medal.

One of his expeditions, to Big South Cape Island in 1964, had a profound effect on his conservation methods. The island had become overrun by ship rats, which devastated the island's plant and animal life. Within two years five species of native bird and a bat had become extinct. These depredations confirmed Brian in his view, by no means universal at the time, that introduced rodents and other mammals had had a disastrous impact on New Zealand's endemic birds. He quickly realised the essential importance of preventing these mammals from gaining access to new islands, as well as the practical possibility of removing some populations already established. He has become an energetic nemesis of introduced rats, cats, goats, sheep, cattle, rabbits, pigs, possums and Wekas, organising successful eradication campaigns from the sub-tropical Kermadec Islands to subantarctic Campbell Island.

The other important outcome of his visit to Big South Cape was proof that translocation of endangered birds could be carried out successfully. Small numbers of Stead's Bush Wren, South Island Saddleback and Stewart Island Snipe were transferred to nearby rat-free islands. The Saddlebacks survived and became the forebears of a safe population now distributed among additional islands. The experience gained over the years by Brian and his colleagues has enabled translocation of endangered birds and other wildlife to become a routine conservation technique in New Zealand. Many birds have benefited, most notably the Black Robin, the Kakapo, and the North and South Island Saddlebacks.

In the course of his many expeditions Brian has built up an unrivalled knowledge of New Zealand islands and their birds. He is an authority on the region's seabirds - indeed, no matter how remote their locations, few major seabird colonies have escaped a visit from him. His island expertise has been utilised overseas on the Galapagos Islands, Norfolk Island, and on Christmas Island, where he played an influential role in gaining the appointment of a Conservator for the protection of Abbott's Booby.

Brian readily shares his knowledge and enthusiasm for

birds with other people. New and young members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand have received special encouragement. He joined the OSNZ in the late 1940s and soon became involved in its activities. He has served on its Council for over 25 years, was President for eight years in the 1970s and was elected President again in 1989. He initiated *OSNZ News* and began OSNZ field study weekends and courses. He has continually encouraged amateur ornithologists to learn more about their birds and to become involved in conservation programmes. His own observations have been reported in more than 50 articles, and he is co-editing a forthcoming ICBP technical bulletin on the management of endangered birds. He is a regional member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and is on the organising committees for the 1990 International Ornithological Congress and the World Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation.

His contacts with the RAOU and Australian ornithology began more than 20 years ago, with an extensive Australian trip to meet ornithologists and see our birds. Afterwards with Archie Blackburn he organised two RAOU Congresses in New Zealand. Recently he undertook an RAOU consultancy investigating the status of the endangered White-breasted White-eye on Norfolk Island.

Throughout his career Brian Bell has been one of the most influential ornithologists in New Zealand. His ideas and, above all, his action have been vital contributions to the effective conservation of endangered birds in that country. Election as an RAOU Fellow recognises Brian's remarkable achievements, as well as the Union's wider Australasian interests.

P.J. Moors