

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION: RESPONSIBILITIES AND SUCCESSES

HARRY BROAD

Manager, Strategic Issues, Department of Conservation, Wellington

ABSTRACT

We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganised. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganising, and a wonderful method it can be for completing the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralisation (Petronius Arbitr, 210 B.C.).

You can go back to the Roman Empire for the most up-to-date view on corporate toecutting in New Zealand. However, the Department of Conservation is the exception that proves the rule! Its mandate is splendidly summed up in the definition of conservation contained within our act:

“Conservation means the preservation and protection of natural and historic resources for the purpose of maintaining their intrinsic values, providing for their appreciation and recreational enjoyment by the public, and safeguarding the options of future generations.” Such a worldview is not shared by all sectors of New Zealand society but it is the mandate within which we work.

The flagship for conservation management must be the offshore island eradication programme, which has taken off in a big way in the last decade. Twenty-five years ago it was stated at an islands conference that it would be impossible to eradicate rats from anywhere but islands under 2 ha. Now we are doing islands of 11,000 ha. This has happened through professional science being linked with operations, peer review groups, and the incremental building of skills and experience to the point where we could tackle Campbell Island. Also because departmental staff in the frontline always perform far better than their salaries would suggest!

The success of these techniques is leading to them being applied to specific sites on the mainland. We have gone for intensive management with pests being nearly completely excluded or knocked down and kept at low levels for a significant period of time. There are seven mainland island sites, five kiwi sanctuaries, and a whole lot of smaller sites. In the order of 100,000 ha are being maintained and managed. Communities are making massive contributions; in the case of kiwi, local communities conduct a hundred protection programmes,

and actively manage sanctuaries totalling around 25,000 ha. The Department acknowledges that we are not the only professionals, and that the range of skills and experience within communities is crucial for the protection of our biodiversity.

The challenge facing all conservationists is how to apply the lessons to much greater areas of significance in the face of the very real threats posed by the decline and possible extinctions of a whole range of indigenous flora and fauna. Though we are urgently working on a varied array of tools and techniques to deal with these threats to indigenous biodiversity, the fundamental lesson of ecology is that it teaches humility. We are constantly on a steep learning curve because the complex interactions between and among species always challenge us. We know so little of the overall picture.

(Editor's note. Harry Broad declined to submit a full paper on his topic. His presentation was ad lib and what is given as an abstract was a guide for this. Petronius Arbiter may well have been pleased with this approach.)



Orchids. New Zealand has around one hundred native orchid species out of a world total of some 18,500 species! Recently the Department of Conservation brought a prosecution against some "amateur botanists" who were trying to smuggle some rare native species out of the country; the Courts imposed a hefty fine. Illustrated are a greenhood or tutukiwi, *Pterostylis banksii*, and a spider orchid, *Corybas trilobus* (placed by some authorities in a segregate genus *Nematocerus*). (del. Hugh Wilson).