

Force of Nature: A conservation history of Forest & Bird 1923–2023

By David Young and Naomi Arnold, Potton & Burton, October 2024, hardcover, 364 pages, \$89.99. Reviewed by Peter Laurenson, New Zealand Alpine Club.

Force of Nature explores the first century of achievements of the New Zealand Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society. In large hardcover format extending to 323 pages plus maps, endnotes, acknowledgements and index, this is no light read. Although the numerous accounts of conservation wins are inspiring and uplifting, the underlying subject – the protection of nature from destruction by humans – remains sobering. And describing one hundred years of Forest & Bird conservation history encompasses a vast array of facts and information, all of which is meticulously researched and referenced.

In the Prelude, a few conservation efforts in Aotearoa are described that extend back even earlier than 1923 when Captain Val Sanderson became the first secretary of the Native Bird Protection Society, marking the beginning of Forest & Bird's first century. One of Sanderson's standout achievements was to initiate the restoration of nature on Kāpiti Island, which became Aotearoa's first island nature sanctuary.

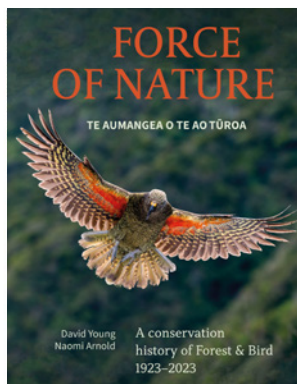
As Forest & Bird developed, its focus expanded from birds to include the forest and other habitats birds need to survive. Initial campaigns were aimed at preventing logging, then mining, then expanded to include the eradication of introduced pests as a clearer understanding developed about ecosystem collapse, even when trees remained. In the last 40 years or so, ocean ecosystems have been added to the list.

I was surprised to read about Forest & Bird's 1990 campaign 'Go easy on the earth'. I was living in London at the time and had no

idea that most of the answers to how individuals can address human-induced global warming were presented as part of that campaign. The global warming alarm was actually first raised in Aotearoa way back in 1912 in a South Island newspaper. The reasons why so few were listening then, or in some cases still are not, explains why Forest & Bird came into existence and has played such a crucial role in preventing us from annihilating the natural ecosystem we all ultimately depend on to survive.

While it required dedication to wade through *Force of Nature*, I was never in any doubt that it was worth my efforts. Thoughtfully structured and written, and beautifully designed, illustrated and produced, this book is the most comprehensive account of Aotearoa's conservation story I have read. It builds a clear picture of what we must protect and why, and of how Forest & Bird members, volunteers and partners have tirelessly gone about their campaigns. Over nine chapters, numerous conservation warriors and projects are described concisely. Each account is impressive in its own right, and the collective sum of Forest & Bird's parts leaves me bursting with gratitude and awe.

Aotearoa has been presented to the world as '100% PURE' since the late 1990s. Many Kiwis lay claim to a deep love of natural places, yet our carbon emissions continue to rise. We recently voted in a government that immediately set about rolling back our conservation efforts, cutting DOC funding while 'ministers moved to unwind important environmental safeguards, repealing recently established laws that would have introduced strong protections for nature



such as the Natural and Built Environment Act 2023. They announced plans to reverse a national policy to restore freshwater and amend the Crown Minerals Act to "promote" mining again, while signalling they would allow renewed offshore oil and gas exploration. The government also appointed a minister for hunting and fishing and indicated it wanted to re-classify pest animals such as deer, tahr, pigs, trout and salmon as "valued introduced species" (pp 303–04).

Forest & Bird, along with our wider conservation community, has achieved magnificently in the face of an ever-present short-term commercial imperative. As the battle to protect nature is waged, the consequences of defeat continue to worsen. Take action: buy a copy of *Force of Nature* to support Aotearoa's leading conservation organisation and get up to speed on what it really means to love nature.