

Marsden Fund increase

The decision of the Minister of Research, Science and Technology, Hon. Simon Upton, to transfer the administration of the Marsden Fund and the Marsden Fund Committee from the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology to the Royal Society of New Zealand, became effective from December 1, 1995. The Marsden Fund Committee, chaired by Dr Ian Axford FRS, will function as an independent entity and be accountable to the Minister under delegated authority for the *purchase of research outputs which support and encourage excellence in science, enhance the underpinning scientific knowledge-base, and broaden and deepen the research skill base in New Zealand, regardless of whether or not the research contributes to the Government's socio-economic priorities.*

The Marsden Fund was established to support excellent research and researchers and to enhance the quality of the research that is purely curiosity-driven. The Marsden Fund complements the Public Good Science Fund (PGSF) and in so doing is not expected to fund research that is clearly more appropriate to the PGSF.

In supporting research "for its own sake", the Government is ensuring that New Zealand is contributing to, and benefiting from the advancement of knowledge globally, and is laying the foundations for strategy-oriented research of direct benefit to New Zealand. The Marsden Fund also provides for the long-term and sometimes serendipitous aspects of research, which may lead to profound or unexpected discoveries, or catalyse significant developments in previously unrelated and strategically important fields of science.

The Marsden Fund will have \$11 million available for funding qualifying research in 1996/97, double the \$5.5 million allocated in 1995/96. A further doubling to \$22 million is forecast in 1997/98.

Over 600 preliminary research proposals from scientists have been received by the Marsden Fund. This is some 400 fewer initial proposals than were received last year, the first year of the fund.

In 1995 approximately 120 applicants were invited to submit full proposals. Invitations for submissions of full proposals were this year made in early April. Final announcement of successful proposals will be made in September.

Forestry Corporation for sale

The Government has announced its intention to sell Kaingaroa Forest, currently owned and managed by the State Owned Enterprise, Forestry Corporation of New Zealand.

The announcement follows the resolution of a last-minute hitch with Maori claimants, as well as concerns that further delay could move the process closer to the election, and jeopardise a sale.

Most opposition parties are opposed to the sale.

The Government's adviser SBC Warburg stands to gain substantial fee income from the sale. Warburg will act as agent for the sale in addition to their initial advisory role. Neither the Government nor Warburg can see any significant conflict in the company undertaking both roles. A spokesman for Finance Minister Bill Birch said that it would be "stupid" to bring in two advisers.

SBC Warburg was engaged to advise on the level of interest in Forest Corp, the best methods of sale, the valuation of assets and to prepare a draft information memorandum, as well as to provide assistance with the sale if the Government decided to go ahead.

Fletcher Challenge, Carter Holt Harvey, Weyerhaeuser, and, more recently, Xylem have expressed interest in the forests.

Possible pest

Ministry of Forestry searchers have found Auckland properties that are host to a possible new pest threat.

All were in the same small cluster in the Kohimarama/Mission Bay area.

Since the infestation was first reported in mid-April many dozens of the caterpillars and pupae have been found in nine locations and feeding on a range of vegetation.

Search teams continued working until

they had enough information on the insect's spread and species to decide what action needs to be taken.

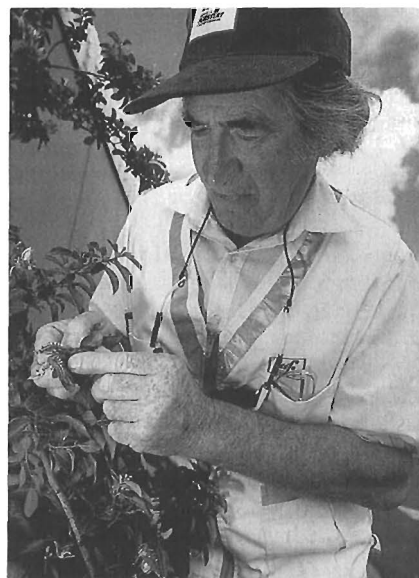
Forest Research Institute scientists have identified the species as *Orgyia thyellina*, a species of tussock moth.

It is described in overseas literature as a 'forest pest' in Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Its feeding preference is for broad-leaf hardwoods such as plum, apple, oak, elm – and roses. Auckland searchers have found similar eating patterns.

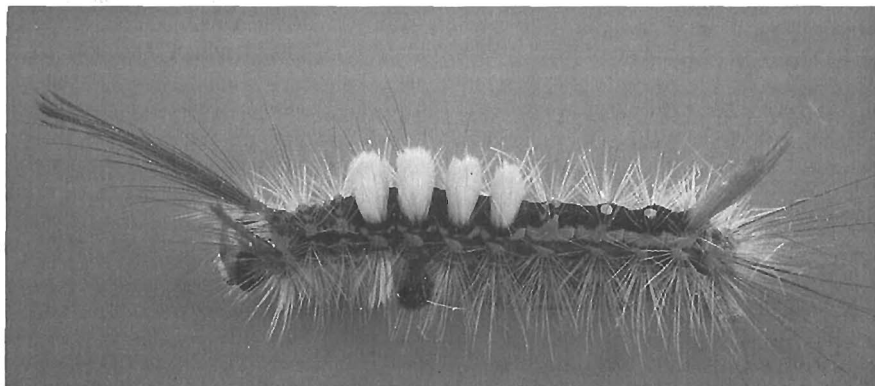
In North American forests close relatives from the *Orgyia* family cause huge tree losses.

Although definitely not the dangerous gypsy moth, the find is the first member of the same *Lymantriidae* family to be found in New Zealand.

Information from feeding trials now being conducted by the NZ Forest Research Institute will be used to decide whether the insect should be eradicated after eggs hatch in the spring. In particular, researchers want to know if the caterpillar is attracted to NZ native beeches.



Ministry of Forestry Senior Protection Officer, Health, Dave Bartram, pointing out the *Orgyia thyellina* caterpillar in Auckland.



A fully-grown *Orgyia thyellina*