Title Forest & Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand) have paid tribute to outstanding conservationist Don Merton, who died recently. ?Without Don Merton, the Kakapo, the Chatham Island Black Robin and other unique native New Zealand birds would probably have become extinct,? Forest & Bird Executive member Peter Maddison said. ?Members of Forest & Bird and other New Zealanders are enormously thankful for the pioneering work Don did to save these birds. He was a guru of the conservation movement.? Don started his career in conservation with the Wildlife Service in the late 1950s, and quickly recognised the devastating impact rats and other introduced pests could have on native birds. He worked to eradicate pests from many New Zealand offshore islands, and overseas conservationists recognised his talents and recruited him to help remove pests, especially on islands in the Indian Ocean. In the 1970s, Don began his groundbreaking work rescuing the Chatham Island Black Robin and Kakapo from extinction. At one stage, just five robins, including a single successful breeding pair, remained. Forest & Bird?s highest honour, the Old Blue award, is named after Old Blue, the female robin that ? with Don?s help ? saved her species from extinction. Where others would have given up, Don tried innovative ideas, such as cross-fostering with other bird species, to save the black robin. The Kakapo population fell to about 50 in the mid-1990s but Don?s creativity and tenacity contributed to the species recovering to more than 130 now. In recent years, Don and his wife, Margaret, moved to Tauranga, where Don was active in local conservation issues and was the patron of Forest & Bird?s Kaimai Mamaku campaign to restore the forest and its native plants and animals. ?Forest & Bird is extraordinarily grateful for the work Don did over several decades,? Dr Maddison said. ?His legacy is seen in the healthier populations of New Zealand?s most endangered native birds today.?