

## Kauri - New Zealand's Majestic Giants by John McCurdy

Many people on this side of the world with perhaps only a passing interest in trees will be aware of the huge redwood trees found in California, the tallest trees found anywhere. Less well known is that in New Zealand there are magnificent trees not as tall, but massive in their girth. These are the **Kauri pine (Agathis australis)** which fossil records indicate date back to the Jurassic period. The enormous size of the unbranched trunk and the quality of the timber led to the almost destruction of the species when the white man arrived in the country and saw their potential for construction timber and beautiful furniture.

In the Maori peoples' world they were the largest living thing, which consequently they revered as gods. Two of the last remaining ancient Kauri 2000 to 2500 years old 'Te Matua Ngahere' (Father of the Forest) and 'Tane Mahuta' (Lord of the Forest) still alive today, were there long before Captain Cook and the first Englishmen set foot in New Zealand. There are probably less than twenty giant Kauris surviving 200 years of rapacious logging. Thankfully the New Zealand government realised this so the remaining specimens are fully protected in reserves, the main one being Waipoua State Forest well north of Auckland. Other reserves are in the Coromandel Peninsula and Great Barrier Island to the north. Both areas and those where Kauri are being regenerated, are in the north of North Island where temperatures are sufficiently high. Collectively there are five protected Kauri forest areas around Hokianga Harbour which have been combined to form 'Northland Kauri National Park'.



*Photo credit: thetreeographer.com*

I have been fortunate to have visited New Zealand 3 times. Initially in 1993 it was to attend the first World Deer Congress at Lincoln University in South Island. After Congress my wife and I decided to extend our visit by a month to see the rest of the country. Eventually arriving in North Island we met a lifelong forestry friend based in Whangarei. During our stay he took me to see many forestry enterprises in Northland. The highlight which remained in my memory for nearly 30 years was to meet the 'Lord of the Forest'. I never could have imagined a tree of such enormous proportions.

To approach Tane, you are constrained to walk on a long meandering boardwalk. Finally on turning a corner, you are confronted by what appeared to be a broad grey 'cliff' filling your view, towering above, and surrounded by shrubs, tree ferns and other smaller trees. Coming closer I realised this 'cliff' was in fact the bole of a massive tree, 60 feet in girth, not a branch for a similar height, and topped by a huge crown of huge branches reaching to over 120 feet.

Up in the canopy there was a profusion of epiphytes, flowers and great concentration of endemic plants.

Kauri forests form an important wildlife habitat for many endangered birds, bats, and invertebrates such as the **Kauri Snail.**



*Photo credit: rarespecies.nzfoa.org.nz*