



**UNDER THREAT:**  
The kakabeak is one of New Zealand's rarest shrubs.  
PHOTO/SUPPLIED

## Saving species worth the risks

By Pete Shaw

Garry was just one badly-tied knot away from lying broken and twisted at the foot of the cliff against which he was now hanging with a sheer drop to the weather-worn boulders 60m below.

As he dangled precariously, I started to question the wisdom of what we were doing deep in the back-blocks and, seemingly, a million miles from any help.

I manage the operations of the Forest Liferforce Restoration Trust, which runs eight regeneration and restoration projects involving threatened or near-extinct native New Zealand flora and fauna. One of these is New Zealand's rarest wild shrub, the kakabeak, a member of the pea family also known by its botanical name of *Clianthus maximus* or as *ngutukaka* in te reo.

So severely have imported fauna impacted on the plant that at one point there were only 80 specimens known to be growing in the wild across the whole of New Zealand. Exactly three months before, though, I had found three more,

clinging to the side of a cliff-face.

The kakabeak flowers in spring. The curved blooms hang in heavy bunches and look just like the beak of the parrot after which they're named. But today only a few lonely specimens remain in the wild, clinging to the inhospitable cliffs in a desperate defence against goats, deer and other exotic browsers.

Material gathered from kakabeak play a crucial role in hauling the species back from the brink of extinction.

Which is why, early that morning, my friend Garry Kane was hanging above the bush, carefully harvesting its seed pods, each packed to bursting with small seeds.

Despite the danger, I realised the work is vital and exercises like this are absolutely necessary if some of our less well-known species are not going to slip away, unnoticed, into obscure extinction.

"All good mate, mate, I'm starting the climb back up," said Garry to my relief.

■ *Pete Shaw is a trustee of the Forest Liferforce Restoration Trust, a privately-funded organisation working to restore threatened species of fauna and flora.*