

## NEWS RELEASE

### RARE MOTH DISCOVERED IN LOCAL DUNES

A species of native moth, which had its only previous North Island record near Hamilton in 1880, has been found in dunes near the mouth of the Whangaehu River. Last month, Colin Ogle, advisory scientist at the Department of Conservation's Wanganui Conservancy office, collected several caterpillars of a species of leaf-rolling moth from plants of the native sand daphne (Pimelea arenaria), and sent them to Brian Patrick, an entomologist in the Department's Dunedin office, for identification. Brian raised these on the leaves of other Pimeleas, and identified the resulting moths as Ericodesma aerodana. The moths are about 1 centimetre long, wings silvery grey with small chestnut brown patches.

Many of our native moths have very specific food plants said Colin Ogle. Sometimes their larvae can feed only on one species of native plant or, as in the case of Ericodesma aerodana which feeds on native daphnes (Pimelea species), several closely related plants.

Brian Patrick says that species of Pimelea are particularly rich in associated moth species. As an example, some years ago Dr K J Fox of Manaia found another rare moth species, Notoreas perornata, on pinatoro, a different species of Pimelea, on sea cliffs between Manaia and Opunake.

Sand daphne itself is considered to be a nationally threatened species, as a result of its decline following destruction and disturbance of its dune habitat by pastoral farming, exotic forestry, urban development, spread of weeds, uncaring recreational use, and so on. Fortunately, the Whangaehu dune area where the rare moth and rare plant have been found together was allocated to DoC for protection in 1987. The reserve is known locally as the Harakeke dunes, and is already known to contain at least 5 nationally threatened plant species and the regionally rare fernbird. The finding of the rare moth, Ericodesma aerodana, reinforces my view that habitat protection is the major key to species conservation said Colin Ogle. Undoubtedly, further discoveries will be made of inconspicuous plants and animals at the Harakeke dunes, and also in other places with now rare ecosystems.

If we protect representative pieces of the whole range of natural habitats, then we have a good chance of preserving the majority of species which are unique to each of those habitats said Colin Ogle. The Department's Protected Natural Areas (PNA) programme is designed to identify and protect the best remaining examples of the diversity of New Zealand's natural areas. Dr Fox's sites for Notoreas moths near Manaia were recommended for protection in DoC's PNA survey of Egmont Ecological Region.

Colin Ogle