

Unseen coastal plant world

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WHERE can we see a native forget-me-not with flowers the size of a full stop on this page?

Or plants of native carrot, mint, plantain, buttercup and daisies, each of which can be covered by a 20-cent piece?

Such tiny botanical curiosities are concentrated on South Taranaki's doorstep, but not many people know they exist, let alone can claim to have seen one.

Few parts of New Zealand appear, at first sight, to be so unpromising for finding native plants as the coast of South Taranaki.

Dairy cows seem to graze right to the tops of the sea-cliffs, cliffs which drop sheer into the sea or on to storm-racked boulder beaches. Where is there a place for native plants?

But a coastal survey by DSIR botanist Tony Druce in the 1970s revealed more than 300 species of native coastal plants between Hawera and Waitara, and most of these can probably be found in the southern half. This is a rich variety, considering the nature of the coast.

Several of the few less rugged places on the coast are occupied by beach settlements, like Ohawe, Kaipokonui, and Opunake. Gardening is difficult here, and shelter and shade are usually priorities. The original natives have fared badly in competition with hardy exotic plants which home-owners have preferred. So what of the real native

flora of this coast? A walk along the beach or the cliff tops, and maybe a careful foray on the cliff-faces themselves (for there are many spots where plants and people may both find a toehold) will reveal many native plants to a careful observer. Some of these are shrubs or trees: Taupata, ngaio, karo, karaka and mahoe.

Karo, like pohutukawa, has extended south of its natural range by spreading from plantings of it and karaka may have spread from pre-European Maori plants. The small herbs include native species of lobelia, groundsel, buttercup, mint, plantain, cotula, gunnera, spurge, and distant relatives of the garden primrose, spinach, and carrot.

The tiny forget-me-not mentioned above had been aptly named *Myosotis pygmaea* var. *minutiflora* (the pygmy forget-me-not with minute flowers).

Some of the species are known from few other parts of New Zealand.

To the home gardener, the best-known of these is probably *Hebe elliptica*, which has been much-used in hybridising to produce garden *Hebe* cultivars. The only North Island site for its "pure" typical form is on the coast near Manaia, but it is more common in the west and south of the "South Island".

A green, hairless form of the fleshy-leaved buttercup, *Ranunculus recens*, is only known from the coasts near Manaia and in north-west Nelson.

Its relationship to brown



RARE BUTTERCUP: *Ranunculus recens* is one of coastal Taranaki's rarer plants.

hairy buttercups given the same name near Waitouru and Dunedin is yet to be studied. Another curious plant of this coast is a form of the widespread sand coprosma. On coasts elsewhere it grows on sand dunes and forms tangled bushes to half a metre or more tall, but in South Taranaki it grows on cliffs in tight, almost prostrate, mats. It keeps this form in cultivation and is becoming a popular groundcover plant in garden.

A minute species of crassula, whose leaves are smaller than pinheads, is known only from the Taranaki coast and was named *Crasula manaia* just four years ago. It is now known from near Cape Egmont to Waverley, but is regarded as a threatened species.

Two more small herbs seem to be even more restricted in their ranges, and neither has yet been formally named. Both are in the genus *Limosella*, distant relatives of foxgloves and snapdragons;

one is in a single spot near Opunake, and the other, which was only recognised as district species last year, is confined to cliff ledges from Manutahi to Kakaramea.

Other nationally threatened species on this coast include plants which once more widespread than they are today. They include NZ spurge (*Euphorbia glauca*) and pingao, and a sand-binding sedge which has cultural importance to the Maori for weaving because its tough leaves remain bright-gold when dried.

The protected natural areas programme recommended four special areas for protection between Hawera and Opunake in 1986, and this year added four more between Hawera and Waverley. None of these are formally protected yet.

It would be tragic if we were to lose forever some native species or important sites, but the general scarcity of native vegetation on this coast makes every piece important.

dahlias

because of the spikiness of the being linked to the spikiness though this is an easy way to per the group.

name is supposed to date back 2, when a cultivar developed resembled the *Heliocereus* a cactus, popular at the time. both came from Mexico, the and the original dahlia.

be the dahlia's previous popu- depended on past large gardens labour available to manage A neglected dahlia bed, not eaded, quickly becomes a mess t blooms, dropped petals and ads.

se the dahlia has itself to or its fall from favour.

Conifer

THE FACTS

WHITE CATCHER SYSTEMS ARE MORE EFFICIENT

FACTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES. OVER 120 SOLD IN NEW PLYMOUTH. THE BIGGEST SELLING RIDE ONS IN NZ BY FAR



REASONS WHY

BECAUSE RATHER THAN DISCHARGE CUTTINGS TO THE SIDE AND TRYING TO BLOW THEM UP A LONG TUBE AND CAUSE BLOCKAGE THE WHITE DISCHARGES CUTTINGS TO THE REAR THROUGH A SHORT LOW SLUNG SHUTE, GIVING CUTTINGS A SHORT AND DIRECT PATH GIVING FAR LESS BLOCKAGES. THIS IS UNIQUE TO THE WHITE RIDE ON.



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