

NATIONAL FORESTRY HERBARIUM – END OF AN ERA

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After 37 years as Curator of the National Forestry Herbarium at Rotorua, from 1974-2011, Chris Ecroyd has retired to Nelson, to be closer to the South Island high country. During that time Chris and the (Forest Research) Herbarium became synonymous in botanical circles throughout the country.

He is known for his expertise in identification of eucalypts and pines, and he produced useful keys to each of these groups that are commonly planted and sometimes naturalised in New Zealand. The interactive, digital Key to Cultivated Pines recently made available on the Herbarium page of the Scion website is a proud achievement.

Alongside involvement with plantation forestry species, Chris gained a very good knowledge of the native flora. Chris was one of the founders of the Rotorua Botanical Society in 1984, and supported it in various roles on the committee, in behind-the-scenes activities, and by attending or leading field trips. Botanical Society field trips were an important source of unusual plant records for the Herbarium, and gave the opportunity to hone his skills identifying divaricating shrubs, forest floor turf species, and orchids. He thrived on the challenge of obscure or hard-to-identify species such as *Hydrocotyle* spp., and his keen eye noticed a new adventive species, *H. bowlesioides*, in Northland.

Working a few hundred metres from a thermal reserve gave the opportunity for interesting lunch-time walks and he spotted *Caleana minor* amongst the tea-tree, the only known site in New Zealand of this very rare duck orchid, usually considered a vagrant from Australia. DOC has now taken over care of this small clump that Chris monitored and protected for over 30 years. Further along the road, at the Rotorua racecourse, Chris found an extensive colony of the red bearded orchid, *Calochilus robertsonii*, being

mown in the turf. He managed to achieve a change in mowing regime so that the plants had a chance to flower, and the population increased. DOC and volunteers now look after this site as well. Chris also worked on geothermal flora at several sites including Waikite and Waimangu, providing information so that the native vegetation was protected during development for tourism.

In studies on *Pittosporum turneri* or 'tent pole tree', a threatened central North Island endemic, he found that possums heavily browsed the adult foliage and flowers so no adult trees were apparent, no seed was produced and the population was not regenerating. His solution of aluminium collars on the trunks was successful and is still used to prevent possum browse.

For Chris, the highlight of his career was his research on *Dactylanthus taylorii*, a native plant that parasitises forest tree roots, and the discovery that the rare, threatened native short-tailed bats fly in and drink nectar from its bowl-shaped flowers. Following this work, many populations have been located in forest from the central North Island to East Cape. DOC's pest control and caging of plants against rats and possums following Chris's research advice now allows plants to flower each autumn and subsequently set seed.

Over Chris's time at Rotorua, the herbarium has grown from about 8000 specimens to about 27 000, and Chris himself collected more than 4800 of the additions, some on Botanical Society trips.

He has identified thousands of plant specimens for scientists, local botanists, foresters and sawmillers. His departure from the district leaves a large gap and he will be greatly missed. A new curator, Dr. Matt Buys, an experienced taxonomist but new to the New Zealand flora, has been appointed, and will take up the position at the end of June.