

COUNTRY MEMBERS

I would like to include in the next issue a list of our country members by localities, which would I feel be of interest to all members, particularly those visiting new areas and keen to meet a local botanist. Should any country member have any objection to such a list please let me know now!

We would also like to see more country members - not to swell numbers, but to have a wider representation and correspondence in botanical matters. The Newsletter alone should serve as a valuable source of information - and would go a long way to making a provincial flora with the many records accumulated over the years. If you know of people in the country who are not yet members, then please introduce them.

THE AUCKLAND SCENE

The new term of extension courses at the University has seen the start of a course on "New Zealand Flora," ably conducted by Dr Rattenbury and Mr Farnell. Both longstanding members of our Society, they are an excellent example of the way in which the professional botanist complements the horticulturalist. This type of course is ideal for one who wishes to brush up and learn of new facets of New Zealand botany, and more important perhaps for those who feel a need to gain a more formal knowledge of botany. It is to be hoped this course will be repeated and that as many members as possible both attend and contribute to it.

The instigation of copper prospecting on Coppermine Island in the Hen and Chickens Group (off Whangarei) provoked considerable feeling among conservationists earlier this year and the matter has not been resolved as yet. The initial prospecting was inadequate and a further survey is about to be carried out. This sanctuary is of considerable interest in view of the unusual native flora and fauna and the possible destruction of this has caused widespread protests at the short-sightedness of this action. It has fortunately led to a review of the whole position of Nature Conservation in New Zealand, with a plea for a more effective body to administer the reserves remaining to us. Following a large meeting in Auckland, a gathering of all interested organisations in Wellington recently reviewed the whole situation and made recommendations. Dr Rattenbury attended, and it is hoped to have a report in the next issue, when their deliberations are available.

On our own doorstep one cannot fail to be struck by the absence of suitably arranged Botanical Gardens, where our native flora is displayed to good effect for educational purposes. Suitable collections are not lacking, due to foresight in the past, but the bodies which administer them now take little or no interest in their potential. Most members will know of the excellent collection of trees and shrubs at Middlemore Hospital which Mr Farnell (now retired) created over the years, and now neglected. In the city, the Domain shrubberies are neither labelled nor cared for, and the Fernery is in a disgraceful state.

How many children leave school, having taken biology even, without knowing the commonest members of our bush flora? Teachers may not always feel competent in identification, but a well-labelled live collection can teach more in an hour or two than a term's class study. The Society is in a position to offer technical help to any authority which is willing to make use of these collections. It is no good talking about conservation if no steps are taken to educate the general public in the need for it - and this starts in the schools. The axe and the bulldozer will continue to destroy our heritage unless the public is convinced of the urgent need to save some of our unique flora and fauna.

R E P O R T S O N L E C T U R E S

"CHEMICAL EXPLORATION OF NEW ZEALAND PLANTS AND FUNGI."

On Wednesday evening, 6th April, we were treated to an outstanding lecture by Professor L.H. Briggs on the "Chemical Exploration of New Zealand Plants and Fungi" - his life's work.

Professor Briggs started with a picture of the Globe, siting New Zealand in the centre, showing how it is surrounded by a very large area of ocean, which modifies the extreme temperature changes which occur in other lands. This position also helps to explain our unique flora and fauna. The biggest proportion of our birds are endemic, and two-thirds of our plants.

He told us that many of our plants are poisonous and that the Maoris did not use any of them internally, until after Captain Cook visited these Islands. One of the most poisonous is the Blueberry (Dianella Intermedia). The Kawakawa (Macropiper Excelsum) is not, and the intoxicant in it is not alcohol, but the active principle affects the leg muscles.

Most of our timber trees contain resins and volatile oils, of which he gave several examples. Kohekohe (Dysoxylum spectabile) and Griselinia have bitter principles. If you wish to taste any plants, they are safe as long as you don't swallow! Moral - don't chew where you can't spit! Rangiera (Brachyglottis repanda) and the "Senecios" have the same alkaloid. Pukatea (Laurelia novae-zelandiae) has 7 alkaloids similar to the morphine group. One of the most remarkable plants is the poroporo (Solanum aviculare). This plant contains a steroid alkaloid which is most useful for the manufacturing of various steroids e.g. Cortisone, and there is a big demand for its seeds. Both Germany and Russia have a large acreage of it under cultivation.

The "Coprosmas" contain dye chemicals which can produce various shades of colour according to the mordant used. We were able to examine some of these dyes on colour charts.

It is impossible to record the whole of Professor Briggs' lecture but it was one of the most interesting talks the writer has listened to. After questions a hearty vote of thanks was carried by acclamation.

L.W. Butler.