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! Rangiora (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.