

We have several startling nesting boxes made from tomato cases which seem to be just the right size. We did make one shallower nest and though the birds looked in, none would claim it till we added three inches to the bottom when it was claimed straight away. Even in the off season the birds make periodic inspections of their nests and pity any interloper. One day there was such a commotion in one nest and lo and behold out backed one starling dragging another one out through the $1\frac{1}{2}$ " opening by the beak. As soon as it was released it took off, while the owner settled on top of its box preening its ruffled feathers.

LECTURE

April. ----- Mrs. M. Taylor. ----- How to Look at Coprosmas.

No doubt there are many of us who are easily put off by the seeming difficulties involved in the identification of Coprosmas, especially as they have such a nasty habit of hybridizing freely. We become lazy about them and in the end satisfy ourselves by merely establishing that the plant before us is a Coprosma species! Those of us who attended Mrs Taylor's excellent lecture will, I'm sure, have a somewhat different attitude in future. She showed us that they are not impossible but only require a little extra care - and a good hand lens.

We were told that there are 40 different species in New Zealand, of which 10 are large leaved, the remainder having much smaller leaves. The first species were collected on Cook's first voyage by Banks and Solander and some beautiful plates of them were prepared. They were never published, however, and therefore the names they gave to them are invalid. On Cook's second voyage, the Forsters collected and pressed specimens of Coprosma foetidissima which stank out their cabin and led them to coin the name Coprosma, which comes from the Greek for the smell of dung. This was a little unfair on a genus that has only two members with a really unpleasant smell.

It was pointed out that vegetative characteristics are the most useful when identifying Coprosmas. They have opposite leaves, usually in pairs, although they have been reported as occurring in threes occasionally on some species such as C. robusta and C. australis, and Mrs Taylor mentioned a Coprosma repens which had leaves arranged spirally up the stem. Domatia are usually present. These are the depressions on the underside of the leaf, in the angles between lateral veins and the midrib.

Another most important characteristic is the stipule, which, as one theory has it, is formed by the fusion of the two leaf bases. Their function is thought to be to give some protection to the young leaves at the growing point, by secreting a mucilaginous substance. In Coprosmas the stipules have one or more tooth-like outgrowths called denticles. These are juicy if squeezed when young but dry up, wither and sometimes drop off when older. Stipules and denticles are fairly standard for a particular species and are therefore a most useful guide to

correct identification. We were shown a chart with some very clear drawings of different types of stipules.

There are other vegetative characteristics that are useful. In C. robusta, for example, there are tiny hairs on the margins of the young leaves especially, but these are not present in C. lucida. The leaves of C. astonii have a notch at the tip with a tuft of hairs in.

Flowers of Coprosmas are not much use for identification purposes and fruit colour is not rigid enough to be relied upon completely. C. parviflora fruit for instance, can be any one of the complete range of Coprosma fruit colours except blue.

There were living specimens of a number of Coprosma species for us to look at, a very useful complement to the lecture.

At this point we were introduced to a second speaker, Miss Sue Clark, a University student who is at present looking at Coprosma macrocarpa to see whether the mainland form is distinct from the Three Kings plant. She drew diagrams for us showing the different fruit arrangements in C. macrocarpa and C. robusta and discussed these in some detail.

The last part of this most interesting evening was taken up with a series of slides of several different Coprosma species. Our thanks go to Mrs Taylor, Miss Clark, Mr. Braggins for the slides and Mrs Bedford who provided much of the living material.

A.D.P.

OUTING

MERCER BAY TRACK - 16th. JUNE

Our visit to this track drew an attendance of 41, which is a little below our usual number of late. The weather, for the time of the year, was mild and pleasant, making our walk most enjoyable. Very good visibility enabled us to see, before setting off, Mt. Karioi some 80 or 100 miles to the south.

It was not long before we were able to draw the attention of our members to two plants quite new to some of them, Myosotis petiolata var. pansa and Mentha cunninghamii.

On reaching the turnoff to the Comans Track, we came to Corokia cotoneaster in plenty, making a fine show with its bright red berries. The native passion fruit, Tetrapathea tetrandra, was also plentiful in this spot.

From here the usual mixed coastal vegetation was passed through. There were Sophora microphylla var. fulvida, Flanchonella novo-zelandica (tawapou), Metrosideros excelsa (pohutukawa),