

Mr C. Devonshire of Tamaterau, near Parua Bay, reports that a few similar trees with trunks 3± metres in circumference and about 15 metres high grow there, flower intermittently, and look like M. kermedecensis. Such trees could date from 1900 or earlier. Clearly much more work is needed on these.

(c) **Little Barrier.** Our secretary Sandra Jones and her husband visiting Little Barrier, 29-30 April 1983 found an apparent M. excelsa in flower. Half a dozen flower heads and a dozen heads of flower buds still to flower. It was one of a line of pohutukawas along the shore between the hut and the shag colony, a little nearer to the shags than to Boulder Point. It was about the sixth tree along from the fence or stile in front of the hut. Three leaves were 60—64mm long with an R.I. 0.35-0.40 which looks like M. excelsa. Would you look for it if you visit there and measure stamens if flowers are seen and perhaps get the ranger to allow you to bring back one or two flowers.

Reference.¹ Sykes, W.R. 1974. Journal of the Royal N.Z. Institute of Horticulture, 2:43-6.

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NOMINA NOVA

or What was wrong with the old name?

J.A. Rattenbury

Members may sometimes wish that botanists would stop "mucking about" with the botanical names of plants, especially when they are feeling justly pleased at having finally mastered a Latin name only to discover that it has been changed.

New names (which are sometimes re-cycled older names) come in two categories, viz: 1) names for newly-discovered plants - a fairly rare situation among vascular plants in New Zealand - and 2) names given to known species because the currently-used name is unsatisfactory. In the second category are those plants for which the current name is invalid and those which, in the opinion of botanists who have studied them closely, should no longer be assigned to the group (taxon) to which they hitherto have belonged.

Invalid names arise for a variety of reasons, usually because of insufficient research into the published literature. Most examples come from taxa where an earlier name has priority - a name which was missed by later workers until finally unearthed and changed. The botanical rules of nomenclature are strict and usually there is no option but to change. Occasional exceptions are made, through "legislation" by the appropriate international committee, for taxa that have been in widespread (i.e. international) usage for some 50 years or more and the currently-used name is "conserved" against the otherwise valid prior alternative.

Name changes which arise through more detailed knowledge of or research on a plant group are essentially the opinions of those making the changes and the old and new names are regarded as "valid synonyms" either of which is legally acceptable. With time (and further study) the new name gradually becomes more widely-accepted (appearing in revisions of floras) or becomes quietly forgotten. Such changes may arise when, for example, two taxa are shown to overlap strongly so that some members cannot be readily assigned to either. They may then be

combined into a single unit which takes on the older valid name (e.g., Neopanax submerged in Pseudopanax because there are no useful distinguishing characters for accurately and consistently separating the two genera). This process is known informally as "lumping" and some taxonomists are regarded as inveterate "lumpers".

Conversely, when a taxon can be shown to have two or more sharply-discontinuous sub-units, it may be desirable to consider "splitting" them into newly-named entities. One of these, that which is represented by the "type specimen" (or other herbarium-housed example from the original collection site) retains the current name and a new name is assigned to the other sub-taxon (or sub-taxa). Often the new name is "raised" from a lower category to the higher rank ("variety" becomes "species", "section name" becomes "genus", &c.). Those who regularly increase the number of names in a taxon in this way are known as "splitters". Inevitably, however, it is the nature of variation in the plant taxon itself which must decide whether "lumping" or "splitting" (or neither) must be undertaken. Ultimately, the concensus of informed botanists must establish which procedure, if either, is desirable.

The decision as to when the botanist (let alone the layman) should discard an earlier name and adopt a new one is often a personal one and usually is based on a cautious use of both until time decides which way opinion is going or until official publications such as revisions of floras or widely-read scientific or other papers accept the new name. It may be some time before Dacrydium bidwillii (bog pine) becomes generally replaced by Halocarpus bidwillii, but Pseudopanax arboreus (five finger) has apparently quite supplanted Neopanax arboreum. (Note that the Latin adjectival ending of the specific name sometimes has to change to match the gender of the new generic name.)

In 1971, Elizabeth Edgar of the Botany Division began a series of articles which bring together N.Z. native plant name changes that have appeared since the publication of the current New Zealand Floras (see references at end). The following list, taken from the three N.Z. Journal of Botany articles, include those name changes (and additions) which are of most relevance to Auckland botanists. Only generic and specific changes are given here (plus one or two new family names). Sub-generic and varietal changes are given in the articles for those who are interested.

REFERENCES

1. Edgar, E. 1971. Nomina nova plantarum Novae-Zelandiae 1960-1969 Gymnospermae, Angiospermae. New Zealand Journal of Botany 9:322-330
2. Edgar, E. and H.E. Connor. 1978. Nomina Nova II, 1970-76. New Zealand Journal of Botany 16:103-118
3. Edgar, E. and H.E. Connor. 1983. Nomina Nova III, 1977-1982. New Zealand Journal of Botany 21:421-441