

Mahurangi West, 21 November 2009

Maureen Young

Participants: Leo Anderson, Chris Ashton, Tricia Aspin, Ezra Barwell, Neil Davies, Eleanor Dixon, Melanie Dixon, Marcel Horvath, Peter Hutton, Helen Preston Jones, Helen Lyons, Elaine Marshall, Sandra McLean, John Millett, Julienne Molineaux, Emily Roper, Bernie Salmon, Claire Stevens, Valerie Tomlinson, Harold Waite, Alison Wesley, Mike Wilcox, Maureen Young (leader).

The *raison d'être* for this field trip was to see the four species of *Thelymitra* that had flowered so prolifically on the property of Darryl Torckler late in November 2008. Visits to Zealandia Gardens and the Albert Dennis Scenic Reserve were organised to round out the day.



Fig. 1. *Ileostylus micranthus* growing on totara
Photo: Tricia Aspin, all photos taken on 21 Nov 2009.

The intersection of State Highway 1 and Mahurangi West Road north of Auckland was where we met on 21 November 2009. Here the well-known population of the mistletoe, *Ileostylus micranthus*, was checked while we waited (Fig. 1).

A short drive took us to Zealandia Gardens where we were welcomed with a cup of coffee by owner of the gardens, Tim McWhannell. Tim explained that the property was used to display artworks and sculpture, the bulk of the outdoor sculptures being the work of Terry Stringer. After admiring the paintings on the walls of the very modern building, we toured the grounds and were captivated, not only by Terry's clever works based largely on the human form, but also by the way these were enhanced by the brilliantly sculptural use of native plants.

We had to remind ourselves that botany was the focus for the day, so soon moved down to the kauri/tanekaha (*Agathis australis* & *Phyllocladus trichomanoides*) forest at the back of the property. Here a stepped aluminium walkway and concrete

stepping poles (Fig. 2) protected the trees from damage and led past a couple more installations that were designed to blend with the native vegetation. This was a good orchid place, and 10 year-old Leo was introduced to tickling the moveable "tongue" of the kauri greenhood (*Pterostylis agathicola*), a few plants of which were in late flower. A hand lens enabled him to appreciate the shy beauty of the tiny *Petalochilus chlorostylus*. *Simpliglottis cornuta* was in early flower, and there were several plants of a fourth orchid, *Singularybas oblongus*, these finished flowering and with capsule stems elongating.



Fig. 2. Concrete stepping poles in Zealandia Gardens.
Photo: MD Wilcox.

Another short drive down Mahurangi West Road took us to the Torckler property on the eastern side of the Albert Dennis Scenic Reserve. Carnation grass (*Carex flacca*) was common all along the grassy walkway when we first left our cars, and was later seen in abundance along the roadside. This introduced sedge is plentiful in the Warkworth area, though not seen much elsewhere around Auckland. The rear of this block is covered with regenerating tea tree, which Darryl mows once a year. This year it was mown in March, which was early enough to allow the sun orchids to develop unimpeded, but much to the chagrin of the leader, not a flower was to be seen. There were many, many plants of *Thelymitra*

pauciflora, which open only on hot, still, sunny days. With November having been so dull and cool the flowers had all adopted the back-up strategy of self-pollination without actually opening (cleistogamy). The intended highlight of the day, a good population of *T. tholiformis*, proved to be even more of a disappointment, as the tops of the plants had been chewed off, probably by rabbits. Occasional plants of *T. aemula* were not obvious on the day, and the fourth species, *T. longifolia*, was also sulking. A couple of native sedges in this heathland were *Morelotia affinis* and abundant *Schoenus apogon*, and two native grasses were out in flower; *Rytidosperma biannulare* (with prominent pinkish-margined glumes), and *Dichelachne inaequiglumis*.



Fig. 3. Umbrella moss, *Hypnodendron colensoi*, Torckler property. Photo: MD Wilcox.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Tim McWhannell and Darryl Torckler for permission to visit their properties.

Watch your Step! Counting *Danhatchia* at Tawharanui Regional Park

Bec Stanley

Our end of year celebration on 5 December 2009 broke with recent tradition by swapping a workshop with a walk, dinner with a lunch, and pot luck with a BBQ. Botanical Society hadn't been to Tawharanui since 1997 (Foster 1997) and so it seemed like a good place to return to especially considering it is now run as an open sanctuary with a predator fence.

Before lunch Maureen led us to a patch of the tiny orchid *Danhatchia australis* (Orchid Tribe Cranichideae) in a taraire (*Beilschmiedia tarairi*) grove on the edge of the park (but outside of the predator barrier fence which cuts off the peninsula) which she'd found the previous year. Despite being slightly early in the flowering season there were a few flowers on display which we all carefully queued to photograph. You have to be quick to see this orchid as by January it has started to wither and then disappear underground (where it spends the greater part of the year). We tiptoed around so as not to

crush any, counting about 30 stems. A week after this trip Maureen returned to Tawharanui and found more *Danhatchia*, this time in Possum Gully. There are low levels of rats outside of the predator barrier fence as it is a buffer area where rats are poisoned. We wondered whether the *Danhatchia* might usually be eaten by rats and this control might be befitting the orchids.

After lunch we moved into the adjoining bush. A fence surrounds the whole block, giving the impression that it is all part of the Rodney District Council administered Albert Dennis Scenic Reserve, but in fact the bulk of it, and by far the best bush land, belongs to the Torcklers. Again it was dominated by kauri and tanekaha, with some hard beech (*Nothofagus truncata*) present. Willow-leaved hakea (*Hakea salicifolia*) has taken hold, the worst of the infestation being in the reserve, where climbing asparagus (*Asparagus scandens*) is also present. Despite this, the bush contained much of interest, from a kauri ridge to broadleaf gullies. Just over the fence we encountered an area of *Gleichenia microphylla* and *Lycopodium deuterodensum* with *Brachyglottis kirkii* var. *angustior*, *Coprosma lucida*, *Toronia toru*, *Astelia trinervia* and plentiful *Mida salicifolia*. The small ferns, *Ctenopteris heterophylla* and *Grammitis ciliata* were common, and it was good to see young plants of *Dracophyllum latifolium* growing near the few adults. On the forest floor were abundant, spectacular cushions of the umbrella moss *Hypnodendron colensoi* (Fig. 3) and terrestrial *Collospermum hastatum* was noted.

A good number of species of filmy ferns grow in the damper gullies. On leaving the bush we checked the inappropriate council plantings on the western edge of the reserve and then departed via the memorial gate.

Although the leader was mortified by the lack of the promised orchid flowers, there was still plenty of botanical interest to keep the party contented.

While our delicious pot luck BBQ was being prepared a small group visited the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary Society (TOSSI) nursery. TOSSI are the community guardians of the park. The revegetation uses local seeds, which are raised in the nursery and the plants are returned to the wetlands, riparian and coastal areas. After lunch we walked the Ecology Trail, counting coastal milk tree (*Streblus banksii*) seedlings as we went, and then continued on the Phoenix Reef to look at the seaweeds. We were very grateful to ARC for providing the volunteer house as our base for