

# Editorial

*John Sawyer*

If you asked fellow members what have been the greatest achievements of the Wellington Botanical Society over the past 60 years I am sure you would be given many different responses. The truth is this Society has made a major contribution to our understanding of the local flora, it has provided a forum for professional and amateur botanists to mix and mingle, and it has fought and won many battles to conserve native plant communities and to restore indigenous plants to the Wellington landscape. It has also published newsletters and Bulletins that educate and inspire. The Society's own plant lists for areas in the region have also been valuable inventories for conservation managers.

In my own work area, one of the most valuable initiatives was that which resulted in the publication of the preliminary list of rare and threatened plants in Wellington (Ogle 1981). This was one of the first; if not *the* first, regional threatened plant lists ever produced in New Zealand and became the basis of the Department of Conservation's own regional plant programme in the 1990s. Without that database compiled by Society members the current plant conservation programme would be seriously impaired.

While there have been notable conservation successes, the converse is also true. There are failures that litter the botanical landscape. One of the most significant is the failure to prevent the spread of naturalised plants ('weeds') into many of our most beloved reserves. You only have to look at Wellington's hillsides and coastline to see veldt grass (*Ehrharta erecta*), pink flowered ragwort (*Senecio glastifolius*), the native karo (*Pittosporum crassifolium*) and many other pest plants. Then there is the failure to ensure councils protect threatened plant populations and communities from destruction or preventing them from planting inappropriate species in the heart of our native plant communities. In a Landcare Research report published in 2005, councils in the Wellington region were identified as allowing the destruction of threatened plant communities at a faster rate than most other regions in the country. Six of the top 25 councils in the list of those clearing threatened vegetation types most rapidly were from the Wellington region (Walker *et al.* 2005).

Another challenge to the Society, which is as pertinent today as it was in the 1930s, is written in the Society's founding documents and objects:

*With the object of forming a Botanical Society in Wellington...With a schedule of lectures and field days, such a society would foster popular interest and help the younger botanical enthusiasts.*      Walter Reginald Brook Oliver, 18 July 1938

In a world of competing interests including sport, music, tramping, theatre, electronic media and the internet, the fostering of popular interest in botany may require more than a monthly seminar and field trip. High profile popularisation of the importance of our indigenous plants is needed urgently as is the assistance to the 'younger botanical enthusiast'. How much less flooding would have occurred in the Wairarapa and the Manawatu over the past 3 years had people valued the indigenous vegetation binding their upper river catchments and their streamside vegetation?

While the mean and median age of our membership increases, the greater is the need to inspire and involve younger people to protect *their* plant life. This could be done by sponsoring an annual seminar series at Victoria University for students to attend or it could be by looking at new ways to engage schools in botanical projects, such as asking every Enviroschool to adopt a native plant.

The negatives I have mentioned, however, do not diminish the general trend that has been occurring over the latter half of the last century. That trend, driven in a large part by the Wellington Botanical Society, is one of an increasing knowledge and understanding and appreciation amongst its population of all things unique about the indigenous plant life of Wellington. This 50th issue of the Bulletin shows the work of the Wellington Botanical Society is enduring—a permanent fixture providing insights into the wonderful world of Wellington's plants. But it is important to keep thinking about how the Society must develop over the coming years.

To start with, members must continue to write and submit articles to this journal to keep the flow of information between members. Perhaps the Society could contribute to the new national threatened plant seed bank established by the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network as part of the Margot Forde Germplasm Centre (funded by MWH New Zealand Ltd)? Or perhaps the Society will work harder to identify and protect the most important plant areas of Wellington from further degradation and development. At a time when the Society is making submissions, for botanical reasons, against developments sited on a rocky headland largely devoid of 'significant' vegetation, some of the most important plants areas of the Wellington coast continue to be degraded. Hue Te Taka peninsula is being colonised by weeds and damaged by foot traffic and the sand tussock dune near Karori Stream mouth is being regularly damaged by motorbike traffic. Taputeranga Island is crying out for a weed control and restoration programme and the dunes at Makara Estuary are reliant on the good work of two of our Society members for their survival. The Society must show leadership in recognising important plant areas and seeking protection for them through lobbying and submissions.

But in the end botany is fun and the friendships gained and treasured are

a key part of this Society. We can only hope that, when *Bulletin* Number 100 is published, Society members will still be foraging through the primaeval forests of the Wainuiomata water catchment, climbing up onto the sub-alpine tops of Mount Climie, and monitoring the expanding dunes and estuarine vegetation at Makara Estuary, that the dunes around Wellington and Hutt City will be flourishing with native moths and native dune plants, that Te Marua Bush will have been expanded and protected and further enhanced through pest animal and pest plant control, and that those wonderful potential emblem plants of Wellington—matagouri (*Discaria toumatou*) and the shrubby tororaro (*Muehlenbeckia astonii*)—will be restored to their rightful place as important components of our coastal shrublands.

## REFERENCES

- Ogle, C.C. 1981: The rare indigenous plants of Wellington. Supplement to *Wellington Botanical Society Newsletter*, March.
- Walker, S.; Price, R.; Rutledge, D. 2005: New Zealand's remaining indigenous cover: recent changes and biodiversity protection needs. Landcare Research New Zealand Ltd. Department of Conservation, Investigation Number 3135, Wellington.