

A precious find: *Tupeia antarctica*

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Figure 1. A close-up of a fruiting shoot from the clump of *Tupeia antarctica*. (Photo: Grahame Bell)

In my wildest of dreams I could never have believed I would find something so precious and uncommon almost in our yard!

Weekly trips focused on putting out our bins for collection had led me almost past this large clump of mistletoe, well established on an adjoining driveway in Huntsbury near the Community Centre. It is firmly embedded in tree lucerne (*Chamaecytisus palmensis*). iNaturalist and Colin Meurk both identified the mistletoe as *Tupeia antarctica* (Fig. 1).

As the largest clump it is way over a metre across, it could have been growing there for up to fifteen years, suggests Hugh Wilson. Several smaller plants also grew happily in the tree until a neighbour decided to trim the host plant, which was supposedly in the way. Tree lucerne branches were cut back along with three clumps of *Tupeia*, leaving just four clumps.

I quickly printed a notice to inform the neighbours of the plant's value and to tell about the Polynesian, Tupaia, after whom the plant has been named. He was a brilliant man and great navigator who sailed with Captain James Cook on board the *Endeavour* from Tahiti across the South Pacific to New Zealand. [He also had the ability to act as interpreter on behalf of Europeans and Māori.]

I used netting to cover a large portion of the main growth that was seeding profusely, leaving plenty uncovered for the birds to feast on. To my joy about three-quarters of the ripe fruit have been eaten, we hope, by birds. Hugh says silvereyes – there are plenty around here – are great spreaders of the seed. But it could also have been stolen by rats and possums. Here's hoping.