

## A Biosecurity officer's observation of the flora of ACT Canberra

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I was on a short stay in Canberra recently and just could not wait to start botanizing while I was there. I was meant to be accompanying my wife while she visited her brother for his birthday, but the temptation to "go bush" was too strong. Actually, to stop and explore in Canberra is a challenge; every time you see something interesting from the car, the stopping restrictions on the road systems prevent you. Basically, there are freeways everywhere and constantly patrolled by the police. My bother-in-law just was not prepared to risk talking to a pistol-carrying man in blue. So my exploring had to take place at parks and on a very short trip to the Black Mountain Reserve. The main feature of this landscape was the dominance of *Eucalyptus* spp. and *Racasperma* spp. I did not bother to try identifying any of the *Eucalyptus*, but the number of wattles fascinated me. The main wattles I recognised were: *R. baileyana*, *R. dealbatum*, *R. decurrens*, *R. elatum*, *R. floribundum*, *R. longifolium*, , *R. mearnsii*, and *R. paradoxum*.

What was more fascinating, is that all of these are naturalised in New Zealand, with four of them major weeds, *P. mearnsii*, *R. decurrens*, *R. elatum*, *R. longifolium*, and two becoming weeds, *R. dealbatum* and *R. floribundum*, in the Auckland region.

I also saw what looked like *R. longifolium* from the road, but it turned out to be a *Hakea* sp., with a nut size and shape of *H. gibbosa*, but "salix" leafed. *H. sericea* was very common and just as "weedy" as it is here. A number of small *Grevillea* spp. were seen as under-storey plants in the "bush", with *G. rosarinifolia* being very common and a popular garden plant there. Another roadside plant was *Melaleuca decussata*. The vine *Hardenbergia violacea* was also very common. The mass of its little purple flowers in the bush was a strange sight to a New Zealand botanist, a truly wonderful display.

The Canberra city parks department has a campaign to plant thousands of native trees, a good idea as the whole landscape is rather bare with only "scrubby" looking bush in most reserves. The only major vegetation is on the larger hills. All this planting could be seen as upsetting the natural ecosystem, but it is probably good start to get the area back to how it was before grazing animals were

introduced. It is interesting to note that *R. baileyana* is considered a weed in Canberra.

While I was there I visited the National Botanical Garden. This is difficult to describe and worth more than the two hours my wife gave me. I recommend you go there if possible. I was interested to see some of the Australian weeds in their "natural" (if Canberra could be described as natural) habitat; species like *Acmena smithii*, *Syzygium australe*, *Ficus rubiginosa*, *Pandorea pandorana*. The gardens had an Australian native "moth plant" or *Asclepiadaceae* - I hope no one brings that here.

Always on the lookout, I was interested to see that the *Pyracantha* spp. and *Cotoneaster* spp. were serious weeds in Canberra. This is not surprising as these two genera were commonly used as hedge and ornamental plants. I saw numerous starlings and native parrots feeding on the ripe berries, so you can see how it could propagate so well. *Rubus fruticosus* agg. was also common in pockets. In the open scrub land, there were numerous tussocks competing well with the introduced grazing grasses. Notable pasture weeds seen were *Verbena bonariensis*, *Rosa rubiginosa*, *Malva* spp., *Viola* spp., *Cirsium vulgare*, *Onopordum acanthium*. Other weeds were *Ligustrum lucidum*, *Jasminum polyanthum*, *Lonicera japonica*, *Euonymus japonicus*.

One day the workers of the parks department were sucking up *Egeria densa* from Lake Burley Griffin, and dumping it on to the banks to dry out. I also saw *Muriophyllum aquaticum* in the waterways. Canberra has many pine plantations on its eastern side; these are full of *Pyracantha* and blackberry. I expected to see *Lantana camara* also but the conditions must be too dry and cool. *Pinus radiata* is also a recognised weed in Canberra; why do they plant it, one must ask?

There were some plants that make me feel at home, like a *Pomaderris* that grows in the same habitat as our own *P. kumeraho*. In some house gardens you could see *Cordyline australis* poking its head over the fence, I realise now why it typifies NZ flora.

I regret not knowing the *Eucalyptus* well, but those who do take an interest in them would have great delight in the NSW high country, especially between Canberra and Sydney - I recommend you take a look.