

AUCKLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY

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With the issue of its fourth number, the News Letter completes its first year of publication. We are happy to note that as time goes on more members are sending in their observations and contributions. Not only so, but several members replied most generously to our request for Pseudopanax material and information as regards pohutukawa. To all of them we offer a hearty "Thank You!"; their efforts were much appreciated by the research workers concerned. It is to be hoped that all members requiring specimens, seeds etc., will not hesitate to make their wants known to the Editor, in order that they may be duly advertised in the News Letter.

LECTURES AND EXCURSIONS.

Our session opened on June 7th with a very informative lecture by Miss Pat Thomas on "Tropical Orchids." Miss Thomas has kindly handed us a summary of her address.

"Orchids, although of very little economic importance, are unrivalled in beauty and variety of form and colour. They form a large and cosmopolitan family which reaches its maximum development in the tropics. New Zealand orchids, although interesting and attractive to botanists, are not sufficiently showy to be widely cultivated. Most of the New Zealand genera are found also in Australia. Orchids fall into three classes regarding their mode of living - terrestrial, saprophytic (living on decaying organic matter in the soil), and epiphytic (living perched up on branches or rocks.) Epiphytic orchids have a spongy covering, the velamen, over their aerial roots which helps to absorb and hold water. Orchids have a mycorrhizal fungus associated with their roots and under normal conditions the seed will not germinate in the absence of the fungus. The probable function of the fungus is to make insoluble carbohydrates

soluble for the plant until the latter has become well established. Among the most interesting features of orchids are their devices to ensure efficient pollination by means of insects. Often very delicate and complicated mechanisms are adopted, many of which have been excellently described by Darwin in his book "The Fertilisation of Orchids."

On Saturday June 7th, members visited the glasshouses and propagation sheds of the Auckland Domain to see some of the orchids mentioned "in the flesh." Orchids were first introduced into the Domain about 1917, when Mr. D. Shaw of Vermont Street, Ponsonby, generously donated his fine orchid collection to the city. This was enthusiastically cared for by one of the Domain gardeners, who had been trained at home in orchid culture. Later Mr. W. Swan, who was trained at Kew, joined the staff, so our city orchids have been in good hands. Members saw fine collections of *Cypripedium* (the Ladies' Slipper orchid) *Dendrobiums* (on a much grander scale than our little native form) *Laelias* and *Cattleyas* (quite closely related to our little native *Earinas*) *Cymbidiums* and various others. The "Bamboo orchid" so different in habit from most orchids, was also noted. We also saw the beautiful Cape violet (which will grow from a single leaf) flamingo plants, (*Anthurium* sp.) and many other treasures. The weather was not all it might be so we had afternoon tea in one of the sheds. Mr. Swan, however, entertained us during the downpour with a most informative and diverting discourse on rubber, which interwove botanical information with humorous comment. At the close of the talk Mr. Swan received a hearty vote of thanks from the members, and the gathering dispersed.

On July 5th Professor Arnold Wall gave us an authoritative address on the "Origin and Meaning of Botanical Names." The Professor in his most useful little Bulletin "Those Troublesome Names", had already dealt with the meaning of the generic names of plants found around Auckland. In his lecture he devoted himself to the meaning of the specific names. The Professor solved many difficulties for us, and in his closely packed address he gave us plenty of information to take home. We all feel that Professor Wall has done a most valuable work in making his specialised knowledge available for the members. The meeting concluded with a hearty vote of thanks to the lecturer.

On July 15th members repaired to the University gardens to inspect the many interesting plants growing there. The party was

led by Professor Lancaster, himself responsible for the introduction into the grounds of its most interesting plant inhabitants, native and introduced. Unfortunately the weather was again unkind, and the party was unable to spend much time outside. Under the circumstances they repaired to the lecture theatre, where Prof. Lancaster exhibited slides of Botanical interest, and members were enabled to study the plant world in comfort. The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the Professor.

On Wednesday August 2nd, Prof. Lancaster addressed members on the subject of Botanic gardens. Botanic gardens have a melancholy interest for Aucklanders since they do not possess one. After drawing attention to the aesthetic and educational value of a Botanic garden, the Professor went on to stress its importance from the purely scientific point of view. He pointed out how experiments in plant breeding could be undertaken, how the cultivation of plants native and foreign could be carried out, and how plants both ornamental and useful could be tested out to discover their suitability for New Zealand conditions. He added that many problems of classification could only be solved when we had opportunities of growing plants under test conditions for periods permitting of continuity of observation during a number of generations. The lecturer stressed the great advantage Auckland possessed in having a climate that allowed the growth of an unusual number of plants from all parts of the world. Many beautiful and useful plants remain still to be introduced into New Zealand. The lecturer then showed a series of beautiful lantern slides taken from his own photographs of points of interest in the great Botanic gardens of the world. He also pointed out that even young cities like Sydney and Melbourne had managed to acquire genuine Botanic gardens of great beauty and value. In answer to questions, the lecturer thought a Botanic gardens should be not less than one hundred acres in extent, it should be close to a good supply of running water, and should be managed by properly trained experts. After the lecturer had been thanked, the members who wished were able to inspect examples of the literature on Botanic gardens displayed. We hope that Professor Lancaster will soon give us a Bulletin on Botanic gardens so that we may all be well informed on this important subject "if and when" there is any possibility of Auckland possessing a Botanic garden of its own.

On Saturday August 19th the weather was again unkind, but

a few hardy souls repaired to Captain Keatley's gardens, in St. Luke's Rd. Mt. Albert. Among introduced plants, the Captain has some very interesting Australian species, while a well stocked rock garden, and an intriguing fernery give additional charm to his garden. Captain Keatley is a true plant lover, and during his seafaring days let pass no opportunity of botanizing in wild places. Some of his spoil is still to be seen in his garden.

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We have much pleasure in publishing the following communication from Mr. F. . Bartlett of "Bankside" Silverdale (Phone 7 M)

"It might be of interest to members to know that I have growing on my property the beautiful rare Moss Eucamptodon. Miss Lucy Moore collected it here and was most impressed by its great profusion. I would welcome any member at any time who wishes to see or collect. Also growing here is the primitive *Phylloglossum Drummondii*."

We take this opportunity of thanking Mr. Bartlett for his very kind invitation. Actually, the two plants he mentions are of very considerable botanical interest.

*Phylloglossum drummondii* belongs to a family containing only one species. It is found in New Zealand, Tasmania, Victoria and West Australia. It is alleged to be fairly common in swampy places, from the North Cape to the Thames Valley and Middle Waikato. But "common" does not mean "easily found"! Actually it is only one or two inches high, and as it has a predilection for swampy places, it is easily overlooked. Its small leaves are narrow and grasslike and grow in a small tuft. It produces each season a tiny cone, which grows on a stout stalk two or three times as long as the leaves. The cone has ripened and shed its spores by about the end of September. After that the plant dies down for the summer and appears above ground again about the following July. Throughout the summer and autumn months it is represented only by a subterranean tuber, one or occasionally two of these being produced each year. The spores when shed in suitable situations produce small bodies known as prothalli on which the reproductive bodies are borne.

For many years this queer little plant was a puzzle to