

it is much safer to keep to the familiar name which you yourself can verify by reference to a reliable description. But when you hear an unfamiliar name it is very satisfying to be able to go to the list of *Nomina Nova* and ( provided it falls within the period 1960-1969 ) to find where and when the name arose, and some indication of the relationships of the plants concerned. This is where Dr. Edgar's list can help everyone, though it was prepared primarily for practising taxonomists. If you have a copy read the introduction carefully and don't be a willy-nilly!

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### A BOTANICAL CURIOSITY ?

In a booklet printed in 1881 and entitled " A Little History of New Zealand " I have found the following :

" A great curiosity is sometimes found at the foot of the rata, it looks like a caterpillar with a sort of fungus, like a bullrush, growing out of its head, and for a long time people were puzzled to decide whether it was a vegetable or animal. It is however supposed that the caterpillar burrowed in the sand beneath the rata, and in so doing, the seed of the bullrush adhered to the soft nape of its neck and, becoming embedded there, the roots struck down into the animal, which in time it killed - the roots filling its skin with vegetable substance. The maoris burn these wooden caterpillars and use the charcoal for tattooing."

The curiosity is without doubt *Cordyceps robertsii*, known to most of us to-day as the "vegetable caterpillar". Why it should be associated with the rata I do not know, as we find most on the edge of tracks through tea-tree. I can only conclude that, as the original discovery was under a rata, it was wrongly assumed by the old-timers that there was some connection between it and the rata.

W.

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### BOOK REVIEWS

WHEAT GRASS IS THAT? or A Guide to the identification of some introduced grasses in New Zealand, by vegetative characters.

by N.C.Iambrechtsen ( N.Z. D.S.I.R. Information Series  
82. Govt. Printer, Wellington.  
\$1.25. 1972. 136 pages.)

This book provides keys, descriptions and illustrations for most of the major grasses (both pasture and weedy) in New Zealand. Most of the book is based on Dr. E.C. Hubbard's "Grasses" but deals with those found in New Zealand and particularly with their vegetative features as they are often without flowering or fruiting parts. Where possible the illustrations are taken from Hubbard (38) but 45 are new, provided by