

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.Lambrechtsen ( 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

D.S.I.R. artists who do an excellent job. The great advantage of this book is that it concentrates on the New Zealand plants, making it much more useful than any overseas text which may or may not include the plant concerned.

Minor disadvantages which are annoying include the related species that are mentioned but not illustrated (e.g. Paspalum vaginatum p.107., Digitaria ischaemum p.71. etc.) and the absence of native species, even the ones common in "weedy" situations. Also cereals are not treated in full but a short key to them is included towards the end of the book.

In spite of all this the book will be most useful when dealing with the inevitable scraps of hay presented for identification and its most reasonable cost after a year of shocking book prices will no doubt add to the numbers of potential purchasers.

"NEW ZEALAND LICHENS," by William Martin and John Child ( A.H & A.W. Reed, \$6.50. 1972. 194 pages.)

Or as on the title page "Lichens of New Zealand." With nearly 200 pages this is the largest of the books I will comment on and is also the best presented, with large clear photographs which allow direct comparison of species of most common genera.

The addition of 12 pages of colour photographs (with 3-4 species per page) provides a section that adds considerable interest and value in a book dealing with some of the most colourful of smaller plants.

Quite a few readers will find, as I have, that often an unfamiliar name is associated with a plant they have often seen and this is one of the greatest values of the book, as lichens have been generally neglected ( except for scientific papers ) in the past.

The number of lichen species is huge, but the authors seem fully aware of the drawbacks of trying to cover a representative selection from the 1000 plus species found here and have achieved a high level of coverage with some 46 genera and their typical species. Also included is general information on identification, habit and habitat of lichens and, where reasonable, keys to the various species have also been provided.

Though I have not yet had a chance to use the book for detailed keying, I am sure it will prove its worth there as it has already as a pictorial and general information source.

Lichens have in the past been sadly neglected, though looking at this work it is hard to see why nothing similar has been produced before.