

P. FRASER.

For months I had been looking forward to last years Labour Weekend visit by the Society to Otorohanga. I have not yet met any of the members and was keen to meet you, but farm animals have a way of getting ore back on us.

My farm at Honikiwi is not a botanists paradise - in fact the only creature that could become enraptured is the goat. Blackberry, gorse and scrub thrive. However, even such an unpromising spectacle has many surprises. Until recently I knew nothing about ferns. Oh, I won't say nothing; there appeared to be a black tree fern, a silver tree fern and a brown tree fern. All the others - the smaller ferns - were just 'ferns'. This is common amongst farmers - if its not a tree fern it must be a kind of bracken.

Well, I borrowed several books and can now identify in my own garden fifty species collected in odd corners of the farm. My richest hunting grounds are not in the bush, but old farm drains and offal holes. Places that have become overgrown with blackberry - places where stock cannot get. I see the same patterns repeated time and again. Where there has been a slip or a tree uprooted - fresh earth - and a bit of shelter from the sun, within months it will be covered in Pteris macilenta, Adiantum cunninghamii and Cyathea smithii. This latter surprised me because I know of only half a dozen big Smith's tree fern on the farm. I conclude that they are both very palatable to stock and that frost kills many. I have transplanted many into my garden but invariably the frost kills them off. Pteris tremula, although not plentiful, is not rare, but I was puzzled by a beautifully lacy, frilly Pteris growing naturally in my cold wet pumphouse. I showed it to a friend who "knows all about these things" and the immediate response was - "Oh, that's Pteris comans." It lived there two or three years then disappeared and I still have my doubts about it. Certainly, some of my relatives come from the warmer eastern coastline and spores could have been carried there on clothing.

I have a sizeable block of wasteland which grows nothing but stunted tea tree, a bit of poor Pomaderris phyllicifolia and stunted moss and what I refer to as 'coral lichen' - a stiff white mat that has the appearance of bleached coral. The scrub is very open and poor - according to the book, just the place to find Schizaea. Sure enough, there it was. I spent an hour looking and found nothing so I sat down to meditate on the uselessness of this land. There it was right in front of me. Little clumps of harsh Schizaea bifida - it was all around me and I had never noticed it before. How many 'rare' things do we miss in this way?

Another example of life aplenty but just not seeing it occurred to my young son who is an enthusiastic bird lover. He was 'doing' the swamps, watching fern birds nesting, when he came upon a nest with eggs he didn't know. He brought an egg home for identification, but all our searching only told us it belonged to the Spotless Crake. This was impossible as all the books said the nests had never been found on the mainland. Well it was the Spotless Crake and moreover it appears to be relatively common.

This was eight years ago and we have since watched nests and family groups in at least six other localities on the farm.

Neopanax laetum, Olearia albida, Coprosma cunninghamii, Coprosma tenuifolia and an erect moss which looks like a young pine tree about nine inches high, are among the pleasant surprises that pop up occasionally. I must admit to being a bit confused with the Coprosmas. C. robusta and C. rotundifolia are everywhere and C. rhamnoides and C. areolata are very common also. Less common is C. australis (because the goats seem to prefer it to any other tree). Fairly common, but variable is what I suppose to be C. cunninghamii, and C. tenuifolia so far seems to be limited to one plant growing in a swamp.

This article is, of course, an admission of failure. A good farmer does not have swamps for rare birds or useless wasteland for little gems of ferns, but there are times when I feel like going berserk and giving the farm away and all that keeps my sense of proportion are those same little patches of wild nature, the sounds, the smells and the feel of something unmanmade.

MOSSES IN MY GARDEN

E.D.H.

The family gave me a copy of Allison & Childs Mosses of N.Z. for my birthday! I read it through a couple of times, studied the drawings and photographs, and took it for a walk round the garden. I have long been aware that the Laingholm Hill was wet, but I had no idea that I lived in such a bog.

Under every tree and in the shadow of the hedges Thuidiopsis furfurosum abounds and wanders out into the lawn. Among the stones around the fish pond and along the road frontage this is mixed with Hypnum cupressiforme. A couple of areas of short manuka scrub which lie in a hollow, sport much Cratoneuropsis relaxa, while Cyatophorum bulbosum thrives on the edge of a ditch. A species of Fissidens grows literally in water under the drip from a shed roof and around the outflow from a downpipe. Campylopus clavatus, together with a fairly robust species of Bryum occurs over the whole area, while Tortula muralis grows on the tops of concrete fence posts and on scoria boulders in the rockery. There must be at least six other species I haven't identified, some on the ground and some on the trees round about, and of course I could be wrong about some that I think I've identified. But most interesting.

THE LAKE LAWN AT WESTERN SPRINGS

E.D.H.

From the bus window, the lake at Western Springs looked like a well kept lawn. In fact it was difficult to decide where the grass