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MEMO ABOUT MANGROVES

Lucy B. Moore

Every Aucklander has seen the breathing roots that poke up stiffly, like dirty asparagus shoots, from the mud under mangrove trees. As these 'pneumatophores' grow older they breath less but provide relatively firm surfaces to be colonized by small red seaweeds belonging to three different genera, the common little fouling barnacle, or rock or Pacific oysters -- all organisms that enjoy being surrounded alternately by air and by salt or brackish water.

Trace a pneumatophore down and you will probably find a bunch of fine, much-branched feeding roots and then the thick horizontal support root out of which the breathing roots grow. But how often is there a down-growing pneumatophore emerging not from a root but from a woody trunk that bears leafy twigs above? This I saw recently on the Mahurangi River. The trunk was at least as thick as my wrist and the lowest pneumatophore, about 30 cm long, still did not reach down to the mud; several shorter ones were rather closer together higher up. All were fairly clean except for an odd patch of the tiny red alga, Caloglossa lepreurii.

Another thing perhaps worth recording is ear fungus (Auricularia polytricha) on mangroves. This was unexpected, but perhaps not improbable, on high branches of trees that had died. In another place a fine bunch was growing on a live branch with plenty of leafy twigs. It was in a hole lined with dead tissue that the fungus had found a suitable niche. Has anyone made an exhaustive list of the species whose dead wood supports this fungus in New Zealand?

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