

PTEROSTYLIS BRUMALIS IN WAIPOUA FORESTKatie Reynolds

On April 24th-25th I had the very great pleasure of guiding an American visitor round Ngaiotonga - Russell State Forest - and Waipoua Kauri Forest. Jacob Sigg is in charge of the New Zealand Section Strybing Arboretum and Botanical Gardens San Francisco. My friends Toby and Noeline Clements and I found him to be well-informed and receptive, and possessed of a delightful sense of humour. They offered him hospitality for the two nights that he spent here. I think that we were all surprised and pleased to find the large number of Maori as well as botanical names that he knew.

Because we have had more than our usual amount of rain this year the forests were looking fresh and very beautiful, the leaf-mould underfoot was fragrant and resilient. Because it was an in-between season there were few flowers but the great diversity of colour and form in foliage more than made up for this. Aka, orange rata, Metrosideros fulgens still bloomed profusely, kohurangi, Urostemon (Senecio) kirkii provided ripe seed, as did aka-tea, Metrosideros albiflora. Neinei, Dracophyllum latifolium, had just shed its seed as had toru, Toronia toru, but their form and reddish colouring on some of the leaves of both provided contrast and interest. Here and there tawheowheo, Quintinia serrata, seemed to light up the forest with its distinctive and elegant foliage. Tawa, Beilschmiedia tawa, light green and Nestegis montana, rororo, narrow leaved maire, very dark green, were abundant and provided a daintiness among the big trees. Tawari, Ixerba brexioides, one of our most handsome trees, was full of buds, preparing for its flowering next Nov-Jan. Kumaraho, Pomaderris kumeraho on the approaches to the Forest was also full of buds. But the bank where I remembered Pomaderris prunifolia var. edgerleyi had been bull-dozed clean. Alas! As we left the Forest we saw masses of kohia, the native passion vine, Passiflora tetrandra almost rivalling that arch-villain Clematis vitalba in its smothering profusion! There were great sprays of its orange fruits. On investigation we discovered that these were mostly empty shells, the work we concluded of the Rosella parrots we had heard chortling throughout the day. We did however manage to find about a dozen fruits intact with their large wrinkled seeds, each with a red aril.

Ferns, mosses and lichens, and the streamside parataniwha, Elatostema rugosum, kiekie, Freycinetia banksii, kauri grass, Astelia trinervia, and Collospermum hastatum all imparted a luxuriant tropical appearance. I always greet our smallest treefern with pleasure and on this occasion Blechnum fraseri bore its strange fertile fronds. Looking somewhat dead they proclaimed their state by emitting clouds of brown spores when touched.

In both Ngaiotonga and Waipoua we saw Pittosporum kirkii bearing, at the ends of its branches its large handsome seed capsules 4 cm x 2cm, flattened and two-valved. These split to reveal black seed imbedded in viscid bright yellow pulp.

For those wishing to propagate pittosporums vegetatively May is the optimum month.

On the ground Acianthus fornicatus was blooming, Earina autumnalis carried its last one or two flowers, making us aware of its form and its perfume. Pterostylis trullifolia, often in drifts, was sending up its first flower stems in preparation. Everywhere in Waipoua little Pterostylis brumalis was in flower. I checked its identity with Moore and Edgar and was thrilled to greet this winter flowering kauri forest greenhood. Its flower is larger than that of P. trullifolia. During the day we met many other people enjoying themselves, quietly as befits a splendid Forest and an Anzac Day.

Beaming, a foreigner asked us "Did you see the Orikeets?" We realised that she meant, not some tropical bird, but the Orchids!

Received 10 May 1985

1985, THE YEAR OF THE CORAL STINKHORN

Katie Reynolds

In April-May each year I receive 'phone calls concerning a strange plant, and a question that goes like this — Mrs R, I have found a most PECULIAR thing in the bush/garden. I wonder whether you can tell me what it is? Then follows a description of a flower-like structure on a pale pink tube. Its six arms radiate from the centre, each arm bifurcated at its tip. It is red, and it is covered with a brown mucus. It has an odour, something between sickly sweet and rotten. It is the colour and the smell that draws attention to it.

It is of course Aseroe rubra, the coral stinkhorn, a fungus that has been particularly abundant this year. Inquiries about it have been numerous. In one small area of my rough lawn, the piece that is scythed rather than closeshaven with a mower I have had no less than twelve of them. I have noticed that they spring, literally, from a case that looks like a flattened puff-ball with a light brown mosaic pattern on top. When mature the outer skin ruptures and the stinkhorn erupts from its case, unfolding and stretching forth its arms. The puffball stage is usually 2 cm across, the "flower" 6 cm - 7 cm across and the tube or "horn" 3 cm - 4 cm long.

This year I have had some enormous examples worthy of inclusion in the Guinness book of records. My largest coral stinkhorn measured — puffball 7 cm, horn or tube 11 cm, and flower 18 cm across. Its huge size made it less flowerlike in appearance. Rather it looked like something grotesque from the Animal Kingdom.

Flies visit coral stinkhorn feeding greedily on the slimy brown mucus which carries the smell and the spores. So far this season I have not found basket fungus, Clathrus cibarius which is propagated in a similar fashion.

Abundant rain and mild conditions over summer and autumn have been kind to fungi generally, and there have been many strange, beautiful - and edible - examples in forests, farms and gardens.

For me 1985 will stand out as The Year of the Coral Stinkhorns.

Received 10 May 1985