

NEW ZEALAND BROOMS - ENDANGERED PLANTS?

By Andrew W. Purdie

Acting on information received from Dr. Lucy Moore after your Society's visit in March to Hood's Bush Scenic Reserve, near Whitecliffs in Canterbury, I recently travelled there to look for Notospartium torulosum. I found only two shrubs both of which were severely browsed by cattle. The fact that this has occurred in a scenic reserve is a result of the area concerned being unfenced.

Notospartium was possibly a relatively common genus at one time in lowland Canterbury and Marlborough, being associated with forest margins, shaded banks and river gorges. Utilisation of forests, development of land for agriculture, burning and spraying of vegetation and subsequent cultivation and browsing by sheep and cattle have had a disastrous effect on Notospartium and the other native brooms (Carmichaelia, Corallospartium and Chordospartium).

My present work at DSIR on the biochemistry of native brooms has involved a particularly close association with broom plants growing in the wild. The situation regarding our native brooms looks far from encouraging as populations are very much on the decline. Unless action is taken now to preserve our unique brooms, some species could become extinct. Those most affected are: Notospartium torulosum (found in Canterbury), and N. carmichaeliae, N. glabrescens and Chordospartium stevensonii (all found in Marlborough). The indications are that they are endangered native plants and an attempt will be made over the next year to record surviving populations. The co-operation is sought of Botanical Society members in supplying information on locations of Notospartium and Chordospartium. Information should be given to Dr. Lucy Moore or any member of DSIR, Botany Division.

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By L.B. Moore

At the Hood's Bush Scenic Reserve on 12th March, 1977 two members who foraged widely beside the creek, up the tussocky slope and around and into the bush remnants returned with very slender twigs of a broom with sprays of purple pink flowers, collected from different plants. At afternoon tea when specimens were compared and discussed these two brooms were dismissed by one who should have known better with the remark that carmichaelias were too difficult. Only later, with a little prompting from someone who knew what rarities the area should yield, did it suddenly become crystal clear that these were not Carmichaelia (which has stumpy clusters of flowers) but the much rarer Notospartium torulosum, easily identified even in memory by its longer, many-flowered racemes. Amends were made in part by bringing these records to the attention of Andrew Purdie who was able to find two plants, presumably the same ones, later in the autumn when cattle had chewed the twig tips