

## Something to Remember

L. B. Moore, Lincoln

THE name forget-me-not conjures up a vision of an English cottage garden, and it is perhaps not generally known that the New Zealand flora includes more species of *Myosotis* than all the rest of the world together. About half belong to the subgenus *Exarrhena*, with long staminal filaments, which is confined to Australia and New Zealand. There are still plenty of puzzles in the genus, as the following letter from Mr W. B. Brockie illustrates (18 October 1966).

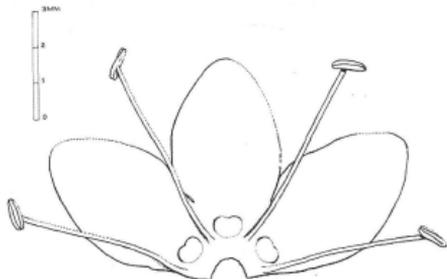
"I have had the enclosed *Myosotis* growing in my garden since last December. I collected it when Harry Talbot and I stayed a week at the Cobb Dam. Previously we had seen the plant growing in Mr George Lord's garden there. I think Mrs Lord found it somewhere around the shore of the lake—I found one later, just a single, rather starved specimen on the roadside near the lake outlet.

"The plant in flower arrangement and leaf and general habit struck me as being somewhat similar to *M. goyenii*, but its very long stamens standing far above the corolla scales showed it was not that species. However, knowing the nature of the habitat of *M. goyenii* in the Hurunui Gorge I decided that the seed source of the odd plants seen on the lake shore must be down below the dam in the river gorge. I went down the very rough bed of the river for about a mile, and almost gave up the search when I came to a massive rock barrier waterfall; but I managed to go 'round, over and down' through scrub following a deer track along the cliff face. About 100 yards below the waterfall on the right bank, sure enough there was the plant in flower growing in fissures and ledges on the high and almost perpendicular rock wall of the gorge. In one place I counted about a dozen plants but could not reach them. However I collected a fair number of plants for Harry who has preserved good herbarium specimens.

"We cannot place the species satisfactorily in any of those described in the "Flora", but in some respects it appears to agree with *M. concinna*."

The specimens arrived at Lincoln looking fresh and green, the flowers pure white except for the yellow "eye", and the leaves representing the full range from the rosette upwards. Everything was there to run the plant down easily in the key: anthers wholly above corolla scales; inflorescence ebracteate and densely flowered; filaments much longer than anthers; hairs crowded, silky, regularly retrorse on the undersurface of the rosette-leaves; lamina of rosette-leaves elliptic; anthers standing above the corolla. All this pointed to *M. concinna* but it should have yellow flowers. *M. concinna* is a little-known species, originally from Mt. Owen, Nelson, and the only piece to be

found in our herbarium for comparison was a single rosette-leaf, which matched Mr Brockie's well. But the description of *M. concinna* revealed other discrepancies, especially in the very short tube and relatively long lobes of the corolla. Mr K. R. West's figure shows these, for comparison with other species in the "Flora" (Fig. 30, p. 808).



Apparently this plant from the Cobb is the same as that which Cheeseman (*Ill. N.Z. Fl.* 2, 1914, Pl. 145) compared with *M. concinna*: "In 1886 I gathered a plant on Mount Arthur which agrees in habit, foliage, and shape of corolla, but differs in the flowers being white with a yellow eye, and not pure yellow as is the case with the type." And in January 1930 Prof. Arnold Wall collected similar plants from Mt. Arthur Plateau. Obviously this matter needs tidying up, with more information from the Nelson mountains.

Amongst New Zealand plants the 34 species of *Myosotis* exhibit several peculiarities. About half are of very limited distribution, e.g., *M. amabilis* of Mt. Hikurangi. *M. eximia* in the Ruahines. *M. colensoi* in Castle Hill Basin. *M. rakiura* on the two sides of Foveaux Strait, the violet-flowered *M. capitata* on Auckland and Campbell Islands, and so on. The commoner widespread species, *M. forsteri*, *M. venosa* and *M. pygmaea* are by no means uniform throughout their range, and at least two named species are known only from their original collections—*M. laeta* from the Wairau Red Hills and *M. laingii* from Lake Tennyson. All are small soft herbs which mostly do not enjoy being overshadowed and so they find suitable homes on open mountain tops, river beds, wet places and rock crevices of all kinds, some favouring limestone. Perhaps it is because such sites are small and widely separated that we have so many species of *Myosotis*.

It seems a pity that these attractive little plants are not being studied intensively. This is partly because many grow in relatively inaccessible localities, and, except during their short flowering season, are easily overlooked. But the main obstacle is that they are subject to fungus diseases and have not been found easy to maintain in cultivation. They present fascinating problems in taxonomy, geography and evolution as well as a continuing challenge to the gardener.