

A TIMELY SCOLDING

OVERSEAS visitors, with no preconceived notions about our traditions or style of botany, can appraise our accomplishments with fresh eyes. Two American botanists have recently* taken us to task for some anomalous features of our botanical "posture" (to use a fashionable word) which they believe are a serious obstacle to obtaining the fullest knowledge of our flora.

To begin with, they find our traditional separation in thought and practice between native and alien plants not only anachronistic but a positive hindrance to taxonomic and ecological progress.

There is no other country in the world in which all plants that reproduce themselves by natural means are not regarded as a part of the flora, and too much valuable information is being lost by excessive concentration on the native plants. If we want to know about the flora of a country as it is, we must accept it as it is and not attempt to divide it according to an arbitrary standard of time of arrival.

Much fascinating information about the incorporation of introduced plants into our flora has already been irretrievably lost by our scorn for collecting weeds. Taxonomic treatment of all naturally reproducing plants in a single reference flora is a logical next step, when the means are available.

Also, like fellow botanists elsewhere (we can comfort ourselves here, at least), we tend to collect rare plants or those from critical groups in preference to common ones, and to travel away to the mountains rather than collect on our doorstep. Consequently we lack detailed information of the flora of many large settled lowland areas such as Taranaki and Hawke's Bay, and of the pre-European distribution and variation patterns of many common native plants. Some of this knowledge is also lost for good.

The flora of Wellington is comparatively well known but not exhaustively so, as the recent discovery of *Raoulia subsericea* at Ngaio shows, and the accomplished or potential despoliation of unique areas such as Cape Turakirae and the Pauatahanui Inlet surely underscores the need for the fullest possible information to be gathered now. Our Society can play an important part in this. Although we are dedicated to the study and preservation of our native flora, let us be equally interested in *all* our local plants, whatever their origin, and above all let us not spurn the common ones — they may be less well known than we think. To quote again from our American friends:

. . . our battleground must be the lowlands, the forest remnants, and the areas going into cultivation daily, and not the parks and glorious slopes of the Southern Alps or Fiordland. A single dedicated person never moving more than 25 miles from his home can do much now that will be impossible in a few decades' time.

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* *N.Z. Jl. Bot.* 9, 217-22. (1971).