

EDITORIAL

Production of a successful Bulletin depends upon a number of factors, the first of which must be a supply of authors who have something to say on a botanical theme and who are sufficiently motivated to put it down on paper. This past 12 months has seen a veritable flood of material offered for publication, in fact a similar quantity to that offered in the whole of the previous three years, and probably more than in any comparable period in our Society's 40 year history. Why should this be?

Several possible explanations come to mind. Over the past few years, as our natural areas have continued to diminish in size and quality, many more New Zealanders have become "environmentally aware". Concerned individuals and groups have had a major, often unpaid role in teaching others about our native fauna and flora, and the ecological systems and processes which support them. The media — television, radio, magazines and newspapers — have played an important part, as have the authors of that seemingly endless supply of natural history books which continue to arrive on the shelves of bookshops. To the trio of long-established botanical societies, Auckland, Wellington, and Canterbury, and small groups with kindred interests, such as the Levin Native Flora Club, have been added newly-formed regional botanical societies in Rotorua and Dunedin (and maybe elsewhere?). A New Zealand Botanical Society, with its own regular newsletter, has been established to link regional societies and to provide other services which amateur botanists may not have had previously in many parts of the country.

In this age of specialisation, some botanists are forming their own special-interest groups; a Native Orchid Society with a national membership and newsletter, and Bryophyte study groups which meet regionally and, once a year, for a national foray, are examples.

A second source of "new" botanists is the Protected Natural Areas (PNA) programme. Initiated late in 1981 by the National Parks and Reserves Authority, the programme was designed to "identify and secure the set of protected areas which most faithfully represents the indigenous flora and fauna, and distinctive ecosystems and landscapes of New Zealand"¹. Once a biogeographic framework and field methodology had been designed for PNA survey, four pilot surveys were undertaken between 1983 and 1985. Overseen by scientific staff from universities and government departments, about 50 young people, almost all recent graduates in biological sciences, were employed under temporary employment schemes to do the field work.

Although PNA survey cannot achieve national coverage without permanent staffing and other facilities, the fact remains that 19 further ecological districts have been surveyed since the pilot surveys covered the first seven districts. Again the field work has been largely done by recent graduates under temporary work schemes or on contract. Unfortunately, few of these people, by now very experienced in field survey, able to recognise and name large numbers of plants and animals, and fired with enthusiasm, have been able to find permanent employment in the biological sciences. In the meantime, many maintain their interest in field biology by joining societies such as ours, and contribute in no small way to the learning and social aspects of these groups.

Another possible reason for an increase in articles offered to our Bulletin is that we are filling a need which alternative bulletins/newsletters/journals do not

meet. That we can produce a typeset Bulletin with glossy photographs is the result of the Society's healthy financial state. To a large degree, this results from generous bequests many years ago, which have been invested wisely. Regular production of such a journal depends on having a large membership, sound financial management by the Society's treasurer and committee, and subscriptions which keep pace with rising costs. Already the cost of this Bulletin will exceed the basic annual subscription to our Society. If the Bulletin appears at intervals which exceed one year, then the annual subscription may not need to increase sharply. However, the fact is that we are being sought by more and more authors, and therefore some hard decisions will need to be made quite soon.

Do we follow the example of the "New Zealand Journal of Botany" and charge "user-pays" rates and thereby risk losing membership? Or do we become selective in the articles we choose to print (say, accepting those with a Wellington regional emphasis only)? Or do we follow the example of our kindred societies and use lower-grade paper and cheaper means of typesetting and printing, thereby sacrificing the high quality production which past editors and committees have built up over more than 20 years?

The "objects" of the Wellington Botanical Society, as printed in the Society's rules, are as follows:

- (a) To encourage the study of Botany in all its branches, and the New Zealand flora in particular.
- (b) To create an interest in, and foster an appreciation of the native plants especially in the field.
- (c) To collect and disseminate knowledge and encourage the cultivation of native plants."

These objectives, especially the last, conflict with suggestions to restrict the number, size, or scope of articles in the Bulletin, or to reduce the physical quality of the Bulletin, especially its glossy photographs.

Our subscription rates are already extraordinarily low for the services which members receive, and should probably be raised to some extent to meet rising costs, outside of the Bulletin costs. If the cost of producing future Bulletins is felt to be excessive then we should look at alternative ways of funding them, such as accepting advertising or charging authors page rates. Similar moves are already being considered by biological societies such as the New Zealand Ecological Society. It is time for the Wellington Botanical Society to debate these issues; the next Annual General Meeting may be the forum for making decisions about them.

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1. New Zealand Protected Natural Areas Programme. Technical Advisory Group. 1986. The New Zealand Protected Natural Areas Programme: a scientific focus: a review in the light of the pilot studies and a format for future action; editors: G. C. Kelly and G. N. Park. DSIR Science Information Publishing Centre, Wellington. 68p.