

WOODEND WILDLIFE REFUGE

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If you are unacquainted with the Woodend Wildlife Refuge I would suggest that you pay it a visit or two. You will find the excursions worth while. It was gazetted in 1976 and covers an area of about 50ha. We travelled there on 23rd February, 17th April, and 1st May, 1985.

It can be reached by following the Pegasus Walkway northwards from Woodend Beach for some 15 minutes. After climbing over a stile near the Refuge noticeboard, the third stile met, continue on to the pine trees and then take a short walk to the left, through the willows. This leads to the open part of the Refuge which consists of a large flat area surrounded by willows. The centre of the area contains a large body of water, known as the Tutai Pahu Lagoon, on which we saw many wildfowl; black and white swans, and ducks, including a flock of 17 paradise ducks apparently engaged in choir practice, moving about on the water; pied stilts and dotterels feeding about the margins of the lagoon; and one or two swallows swooping about in the air above. I understand that there are at least 40 different species of wildlife that frequent the lagoon.

The area is well worth visiting for the water fowl alone, but the plant lover will find the plants growing between the lagoon and the willows most interesting and worthy of a close study. The ground is damp to wet and for parts of the year much may be under water. It is not quite flat but is undulating with small hummocks and shallow hollows many of these latter being filled with water.

On the southern end and western side are stands of Typha orientalis (raupo). Close to the willows here and there grow large Carex secta var secta (niggerheads). Plants of Urtica linearifolia, the narrowleaved nettle, can be seen growing in two clumps of Carex and in many places under the willows. Close to the nettles docks grow, the leaves of which can be used to rub on any nettle sting you may be unfortunate enough to acquire. In this area two adventive species of the genus Polygonum were massed and on 23rd February were in full flower. Polygonum hydropiper, water pepper, grows up to 1m high and has flower heads 5cm long with white flowers. P. lapathifolium grows with P. hydropiper and has masses of reddish flowers on branched inflorescences, some 9cm long. A substantial area of the native Rorripa palustris grows around the Polygonum to the waters edge. It varies in height from 10 to 30cm, the lowest plants generally appear to be closer to the lagoon. R. palustris bears bright yellow flowers and on 23rd February was making a brave show. On our second visit most of the flowers had faded and numerous siliques were evident. On 1st May only a few flowers were seen. It is abundant all round the lagoon, particularly so on the eastern side where there is a belt 40m wide.

A sizable patch of Azolla rubra, water fern, grows on the western side of the lagoon. It was very bright red in colour when we saw it. Many smaller patches of Azolla were seen in wet places. Along the east side it grows with Lemna minor.

Around the margins of the lagoon in a belt of up to 40m wide grew a mass of what could only be Limosella lineata. The leaves were linear-cylindrical up to 15mm long, many were spathulate, but many, usually with narrower leaves, were not. Those plants that were growing in the water hollows were larger ranging up to 5cm long. The leaves all grew in clusters. Their roots were adventitious. Two patches of larger plants growing under the willows in the west and the north had leaves up to 6cm long all spathulate, and many of the plants were connected together by rhizomes. The great majority of the Limosella were growing close to each other and in only one plant of many I examined did I discover a rhizome. 1cm² of Limosella sward gave a count of 13 plants. The peduncles were about 5mm long and were erect at flowering, but after fertilisation they curved down to place the capsules in the mud. The flowers were also in clusters but only one flower appeared to be open at one time. The corolla lobes had white tips, were flushed blue on the inside and had darker markings on the outside. A curious fact was that on the first and last visits the flowers had a darker hue than on the second visit. The lobes were twice as long as broad and had minute hairs on the inside. On the northern end of the area a number of flowers were noticed, larger than the rest, with length of lobe three times the width. The calyx were 5 toothed, 2 of the teeth being narrower than the others. They were green in colour with 5 red blotches on the lower part. One interesting feature noticed was that while most of the plants had 5 corolla lobes many had only 4. Both flowers had 4 stamens sometimes of unequal length. The stigma was positioned to one side of the corolla.

The globose capsules, 1-2mm wide, contained many minute seeds. These were 4 sided, twice as long as broad, pointed at both ends, and were decorated with fine patterned markings. Plants taken from pools were more robust, but not all contained capsules. The peduncles were sometimes shorter, about 2mm long, and were erect.

The area in which Limosella occurred was a large one and extended all round the lagoon. We saw many many thousands of flowers of some 2mm diameter. On our last visit the density of the flowers observed was less than that seen on the two previous excursions. It will be interesting in another season to find the times when Limosella commences and completes flowering.

Limosella is not easily found elsewhere in Mid-Canterbury. I hope that the details given above will encourage members to become acquainted with a plant that is so little known.