

**UNUSUAL PLANTS IN THE SOUTH WEST CORNER OF TRAVIS WETLAND  
NATURE HERITAGE PARK  
I Flowering plants**

DAPHNE BANKS

Some plants in the South West corner of Travis Wetland Heritage Park are rare to, or non-existent, in the rest of the Wetland although they are not quite in the category of "Threatened Plants of Canterbury". This is the area in Travis with which Nicky Bodger and I am most familiar.

The area consists of 4 ha of grey willow, manuka, and some open spaces that are dominated by the introduced weed *Carex flacca*. Removal of willow, gorse and blackberry has led to rapid colonization of part of the area by *Baumea rubiginosa* an uncommon native reed in Canterbury. As Ruth Mason noted, the Travis population of this species is one of the largest in Canterbury (*pers. comm.* to Colin Meurk 1990). It has green stem-like leaves, with very sharp points, about 90 cm tall in the open. Its flowering stem is of similar height and has small bunches of reddish-brown spikelets and orange-yellow nuts which often hang down on a thin thread.

Another plant in the area amongst the reeds is *Juncus planifolius*. This has leaves up to 20 cm long which are pointed at the tip, broad, and often red at the base. The stem is up to 40 cm long with tiny flowers in many small clusters rather like an umbel. This plant pops up in small clearings as does *Juncus caespiticius*, only more sparsely. The main differences between these species are the knobby flower heads and paler leaves with rolled margins of *J. caespiticius*.

Patches of *Eleocharis gracilis* charm with their very fine golden leaves varying from a few to about 30 cm tall. Their culms are shorter and the spikelets are small, about 8mm long. Rhizomes of this species have largish red-purple bracts.

Natural *Luzula picta* var. *limosa* numbers just five plants and competes with *Carex flacca* for air space. Its pinkish brownish leaves are up to 30 cm with hairy margins, and its fine stems with several small flower clumps, which can be mistaken for *J. planifolius*, are taller. Some additional plants propagated from the local stock by Aaron Wilton have been planted back into Travis and seem to be persisting.

*Microtis unifolia* is well spread through the whole of Travis Swamp with the taller coarser plants up to 45 cm tall flowering earlier than finer, possibly younger plants. One year a solitary *Prasophyllum colensoi* was seen. There are two patches of the very localised *Corybas iridescens* that are increasing in size. This orchid has interesting "spidery" flowers.

A few more *Celmisia graminifolia* are added each year. Different plants have different leaf widths and texture, and the flowers vary in having long and thin to short and broad petals.

The most tremendous thrill in the open area was the uncovering of more clumps of *Drosera binata* elongated to over 30 cm as they reached for light through

blackberries. Their leaves were quite pale compared to the red leaves of unshaded plants and they were all covered with tiny insects that were stuck to them. Obviously they do not need sphagnum as there is none in Travis. The only known sphagnum on the Canterbury Plains is at Styx Mill Basin.

The tiny golden-yellow flowers of *Hypericum japonicum* sitting on their little patches of very small leaves certainly catch the eye. *Potentilla anserinoides* with its green-bronze leaves, also revealed by the removal of gorse and blackberry, is beautiful. In spite of now being overgrown by *Carex flacca* and *Baumea rubiginosa*, it sends up cheerful bright yellow flowers to remind us that it is a survivor.

Of the woody native plants manuka (*Leptospermum scoparium*) is becoming more common, spreading naturally and with human help. Almost at any time of the year they produce some cheery flowers. *Pseudopanax crassifolius*, *P. arboreus*, *Griselinia*, *Pittosporum* and *Lophomyrtus* seedlings are increasing with help from birds, and there is one prized 2 m specimen of *Pseudopanax ferox*.

Many of these plant gems are not uncommon in other wetland habitats of New Zealand, but in Travis they are outliers in the dry eastern Canterbury climate. In many instances they are the only known, or largest populations, on the Canterbury Plains.

## II Ferns

### NICKY BODGER

When I first went down to Travis Swamp, I found myself totally confused in the Willow area along the western boundary. The plants all looked the same and I spent most of my time watching where the person in front went, afraid that I might get lost or step on something I shouldn't. In time I became more confident and started to look more closely at my surroundings.

One day Daphne Banks took me in to check and record the rare ferns that grow in the Willows area. By New Zealand standards these are not rare ferns, but in the confines of the swamp and even in the wider area of Christchurch they certainly are.

First off you notice the adventive Lady fern, *Athyrium filix-femina*. In the beginning I thought they were beautiful with their classic fern form. I no longer feel this way. Fickle aren't we. I now reserve those feelings for the wonderful groups of *Blechnum novae-zelandiae*. Often in spring the new fronds will appear in shades ranging from salmon pink through to oranges and reds before turning green. Forms range from the tall (>1 m) 'capense' type to the shorter more swamp 'kiokio' type previously known as *Blechnum minus*. There are various patches of *Blechnum penna-marina*. Their stature varies from ground-hugging up to 30 cm if it is competing with *Carex flacca* for light. The other *Blechnum* present is *B. procerum*. There is one large clump measuring 1 m × 30 cm and we found four more plants not far from this clump. They are all growing on higher ground than *B. novae-zelandiae*.

The ferns can look very similar to one another when young. When checking out or clearing up the weeds in a new area, lo and behold you think you have found a new plant of *Asplenium bulbiferum*, or even better, a new species of fern at the Swamp, only it turns out to be a young *A. filix femina*.

Some of the tiny *Asplenium terrestre* have turned into *A. flaccidum* in the past year. We have several groups of them and these are relatively close to one another. To the south of these groups of *A. flaccidum* there is a glorious large *A. terrestre*. I have learnt that these species differ in where they grow. *Asplenium terrestre*, as the name suggests, is usually on the ground, whereas *A. flaccidum* is a more lax fern that grows as an epiphyte on the lower trunks of willow trees.

On old decomposing willow logs we have found some fine examples of *Phymatosorus pustulatus*, with fertile fronds present. Dotted throughout the willows are patches of *Hypolepis ambigua*, *Histiopteris incisa*, and *Polystichum vestitum*.

The willows area is always in a state of change which makes the life of the ferns precarious. Ivy and blackberry are encroaching while willows are continually falling either from rot or wind blow. The pecking of the birds can also be a problem. This past summer of 2001 we were concerned about the drought and the *Asplenium* spp. showed signs of stress, but recovered well after the first rain. We did cheat a little and gave them a drink at one stage. But in the peat-floored forest there usually is high humidity near the ground.

In future fallen logs will rot, become moss covered, and hopefully more ferns will appear from their wind-blown spores drifting from afar. There is something about seeing a plant that has survived and prospered against the odds.