

DANGEROUS FEET

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Feet: The word feet with no explanation could say it all as instantly through our minds flash visions of the harm that feet can do. Feet – attached to Insects, Birds, Mammals or Humans.

Insects: For example, one celmisia plant can be attacked because feet are used to transport or attach various insects that bore into the stem below the bud, the bud itself, chew the open flower, and eat the few viable seed. Even the grassgrub attacking the roots use their feet. What chance of survival has the celmisia?

Birds: Pukeko, for example, spend most of their day walking about on their big feet feeding. Their choice of food includes such delectable plants as grasses, young flaxes, seeds, rushes, and seedling cordylines that they pull out with their beaks. They then cleverly stand on one foot while using the other to hold and turn the plant so they can eat the succulent growing area between the root and the leaves or stem.

Mammals: Every stage of a plant can be attacked by mammals from field mice scurrying on nervous feet to eat seeds fallen from or still on plants to herbivores let loose on the downs, mountains, and forest for human sport. They eat while they stand, scrape or stamp with their hard hooves. What chance of survival have the few remnants of now rare plants on the Canterbury Plains from the eating, and especially the trampling, of the large herds of cattle and sheep?

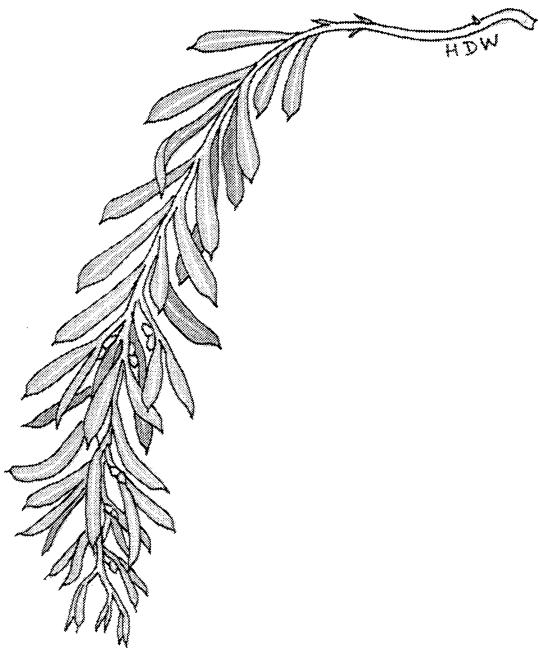
Humans: Humans have the most damaging feet of all causing destruction not only in the course of seeking food for survival but also when using their feet when bent on pleasure. Often this is done in ignorance of the destruction they cause, sometimes bringing plants to the point of extinction. Consider the skier or trumper who think that plants are somewhere to put their feet. Rock climbers will go to the length of removing plants, even lichens that can take a century to reach 2–3 cm in diameter; and brushing off soil to make a rock safer for their feet. Mountain bikers on cross country rides cause damage to plants with the tyres of their bikes but it is their feet on the pedals that impose this effect. Drivers of “rough country” vehicles with their feet working clutch, accelerator and brake propel weapons of potentially devastating destruction across fragile mountains, wetlands and scree. They cause ongoing and increasing damage that could lead to the extinction of species.

Then there is the photographer who sees something that absolutely must be snapped and in the process stands on the last known specimen in an area of an endangered species.

Again, there is the group of plant enthusiasts on a guided walk being shown something endangered and therefore very precious. Milling around on their booted feet and crowding to see the rarity, by the time they move on, someone, unseeing, treads on it.

Worst of all, the botanist, amateur or professional, who has by foot power reached a remote place, spots an unusual plant, doesn't think, digs it up and later discovers that it is a plant new to science.

So much for feet. Oh that we were all experts at levitation!



Tmesipteris "Banks Peninsula octoploid. (del. Hugh Wilson).