

Newsletter. Since 1996 Maureen has been sending in accounts of all our meetings and field trips, so that Bot Soc people throughout the country are aware of our activities.

Maureen shares her experience and knowledge generously with others. Barbara Parris has mentioned to me Maureen's great help with Northland ferns, and I know she is currently giving much support to Anne Fraser in her study of the rare orchid, *Thelymitra mathewsii* in Northland.

Maureen has a favourite saying: "Aren't plants wonderful". Thank you Maureen for your contributions to Bot Soc. We are indeed grateful for all you do, and I am proud to second your nomination as an Honorary Life Member.

Endorsed by Ewen Cameron

Maureen has contributed over 200 specimens to the herbarium of the Auckland War Memorial Museum (AK), these mainly being duplicates of interesting collections that she has put into the Warkworth herbarium.

Election

Maureen was duly elected by enthusiastic applause from members present, and presented with a bouquet of flowers, a picture taken by Ross Beever of her visiting the herbarium in Noumea, New Caledonia, and a copy of "Tree Ferns" by Mark Large and John Braggins.

Book Review: Wild plants in Auckland by Alan Esler.

Ewen K Cameron

Alan Esler moved to Auckland in 1970 and was the DSIR's regional botanist for twenty years, covering Taupo to North Cape. The wealth of knowledge he learnt during those years and since retirement in 1989 is reflected in this book. Much of the technical side of this work was published earlier by the author in a series of seven papers in the *NZ Journal of Botany* in 1987-88 (the exotics) and 1991 (the natives). In many ways this present book is a popular version of these publications and people wanting full references will have to go back to the technical papers.

It is an attractive book (250 x 194mm) with a flexible cover with a photo on the front of a coastal grass (needle tussock - uncaptioned) and four of Alan's drawings on the back - though the cover would not withstand field work. The book is packed with the author's attractive line illustrations, a block of eight pages of colour photos of plant communities in the middle, and some useful tables. Common names are used sensibly "...but if there is none, or it is confusing, cumbersome or meaningless, then a botanical name is used without hesitation...." There is a full index at the back of all the common and scientific names.

The focus is on Auckland's urban vegetation ecology, which is a fascinating dynamic mixture of native and naturalised plant species competing for space on permanent and ephemeral surfaces. Some of these assemblages are unique to Auckland. The book is very readable and is pitched at its intended audience: secondary and tertiary students, teachers, managers of turf, weeds and trees, gardeners and others. The readable style of the book has profited from Alan's earlier teaching career and his four talented sons

checking drafts and proofs – an acknowledged family affair.

The book is divided into three parts. **Part 1 'The place of wild plants in nature'** is sixty percent of the book and covers in detail how today's assemblages evolved. They are divided into two sections: vegetation with origins in the past (natural habitats); and new vegetation (human induced habitats). Most of these later areas have never been categorised so fully before. Their descriptions are rich, clearly explained and the species well illustrated, and each habitat is followed by a paragraph of what they will look like in the future.

The original drawings by the author of 322 species (62 pages, 3-7 species/page) in this section are instantly recognisable and this assemblage of illustrations is unrepresented in any other book. In fact for some of the introduced species this will be the first time that they've ever been illustrated in a New Zealand book. To me accurate line drawings are far clearer than colour photographs. I especially like the higher power additions of flowers, seeds, bracts, pith, etc (though some could have benefited by having a symbol clarifying what they are). The selection of species, about one third of Auckland's wild flora, has been well thought out and grouped primarily on an ecological basis and secondarily on a taxonomic basis. In this way species that you are likely to see growing together and are difficult to tell apart should be on the same page. Numbering each illustration (1-322) and using these numbers in the text works well. Their selection was "...because of their abundance, their particular place in the life of the plant community or their special interest."

Then we move into the novel descriptions of **Part 2 'The place of wild plants in our lives'**: "they charm and harm us and impinge in a myriad of other ways that invite investigation." I particularly enjoyed the 'Pasture management on the volcanic cones' section that traces the history of their management, their change of species composition and the lessons to be learnt (listed as the seven mistakes) – land managers take note! Other headings include: Useful plants for building, Gardening mixed the floras, Farming, Wild plants in forensic botany, Wild plants as buried records, Wild plants in plant pathology, Wild plants and our health, Wild plants in laboratories, and many others.

The final part of the book, **Part 3 'The diverse forms of wild plants'** discusses their modified features and how they are utilised by the plant. This type of information is absent from most plant books and has never been produced in a book on wild New Zealand plants before. It includes 11 pages of beautiful illustrations of: stems, roots, and leaves in all their various shapes and forms.

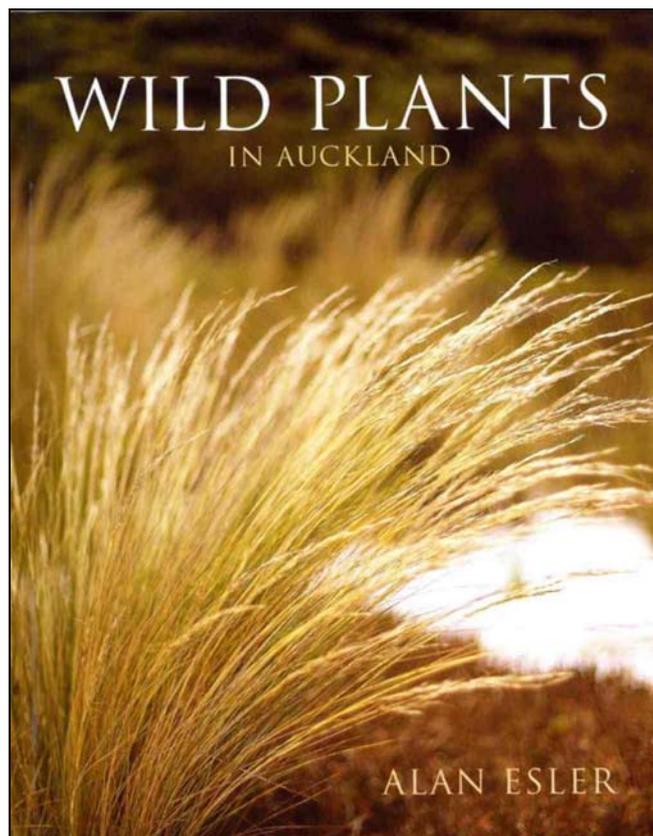
I cannot fault any of the observations or identifications. The only slip I found was one caption: *Coprosma grandiflora*, instead of *C. grandifolia* (p. 27). Most of Alan's ecological observations (the main part of the book) have only previously been recorded in technical journals in New Zealand, or are unique observations recorded here for the first time.

This book teaches the Auckland reader about the wild plants around them. It includes which habitat they grow in, what they grow with, what they look like and how each species reproduces and gets around. It will open the eyes of any intending student of botany or ecology, because, as this book so clearly points out, these plants are all around us. If you want to learn botany just look out your back door or along the street, there's no need to travel to some far away reserve. Such a book is especially relevant today with universities currently focussing more at the molecular level rather than at whole organisms.

The book will certainly appeal to its intended audience and hopefully stimulate a whole new generation of botany students and teachers. Another beauty of the book is that you can use it at different levels and a good place to start is at one of the numerous described habitats, i.e. an abandoned building site, an urban lawn, cemetery waste land, etc. Although it is specifically about Auckland, it will be relevant throughout New Zealand and there will even be a specialist demand from overseas, because the approach is novel and the information and illustrations unique.

In the Introduction the author states that "Our knowledge of plants is quite limited. Although books answer some of our questions, our understanding is deepened by observing plants in the field." This book reflects that Alan is an excellent observer.

The Auckland Regional Council is to be congratulated in being a sponsor of the book, keeping the price down. I'd like to acknowledge the help and encouragement Alan gave me over 30 years ago when I was first getting serious about identifying Auckland's wild plants. This book will fit comfortably amongst my treasured botanical books.



Wild plants in Auckland by Alan Esler.
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