

## Participants

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Liz Walker, David Wilson, Philip Wrigley and Maureen Young.

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## Bot Soc's Gondwanan ramble at the Auckland Botanical Gardens 1 December 2012

Mike Wilcox

Bec Stanley organised this event, attended by a gathering of 25 people. We assembled at the Logan Campbell building, starting with a delicious pot-luck buffet lunch.

Then followed a brief workshop on the Restionaceae – a Gondwanan, monocot family. Mike had prepared a handout, outlining the features of the family, and there were plants of each of the four New Zealand native representatives on hand for examination, thanks to Geoff Davidson. These were *Sporadanthus ferrugineus*, *Sporadanthus traversii*, *Apodasmia similis*, and *Empodisma "minus"*. Actually, Geoff's specimen of the latter – from Northland – was a metre-long, stout plant, very unlike the more diminutive form of *E. minus* encountered in mountain mires, and is in fact a newly described species, *Empodisma robustum* (Wagstaff & Clarkson 2012).



Fig. 1. Our group admiring the African Garden. Photo: P. Moll, 1 Dec 2012.



**Fig. 2.** Terry Hatch with *Elegia capensis*. All photos, except Fig.1, by Mike Wilcox, 1 Dec 2012.



**Fig. 3.** *Restio festuciformis*, Potter Children's Garden.



**Fig. 4.** *Rhodocoma capensis*, Potter Children's Garden.

Terry Hatch recounted his considerable experiences in cultivating the South African restios. He introduced numerous species to New Zealand, many of which have been successfully grown in the Auckland Botanic Gardens. One of the secrets of getting good seed germination is to subject the seeds to smoke treatment.

In the Gardens the South African species we noted (predominantly in the African Garden) (Fig. 1) were *Calopsis paniculata*, *Cannomois virgata*, *Elegia capensis* (Fig. 2), *Elegia cuspidata*, *E. elephantina*, *E. tectorum*, *Restio festuciformis* (Fig. 3), *R. quadratus*, *Rhodocoma capensis* (Fig. 4), *R. gigantea*, *Thamnochortus insignis* and *T. spicigerus*. The most spectacular of these was the horsetail restio or broom rush (*Elegia capensis*), growing in an impressive hedge-like thicket beside the road from the Nursery to the African Garden. An attractive Australian restiad, *Baloskion tetraphyllum*, can be seen near the Friends building.

During our meanderings through the gardens we noted in passing a number of interesting plants in flower, namely *Pittosporum ralphii*, the ombu tree (*Phytolacca dioica*), and the stream lily (*Helmholtzia glaberrima*, Philydraceae) from Australia (Fig. 5). A most spectacular plant to catch the eye was the leopard plant (*Farfugium japonicum* 'Gigantea') (Fig. 6), Asteraceae, from Japan, with huge shiny leaves.

The Gondwanan Garden was the main focus of our attention, and here we looked at various representatives of Araucariaceae and Podocarpaceae. Starting with Australia, there was Queensland kauri (*Agathis robusta*), hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*) and bunya (*Araucaria bidwillii*) – these latter two growing particularly well, as was Norfolk Island pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*). From South



**Fig. 5.** *Helmholtzia glaberrima*.

It was noted that oiwi (*Apodasmia similis*) is now widely used in Auckland for motorway swale plantings and general landscaping. The Chatham Islands provenance (a distinctively tall, stout, greyish-green plant) has been commonly used for these plantings (NZPCN website), and it is now being regarded as a separate, undescribed taxon (*A. aff. similis*), with affinities to both mainland New Zealand *A. similis* and *A. chilensis* from Chile (Heenan et al. 2010).



Fig. 6. *Farfugium japonicum* 'Gigantea'.



Fig. 7. *Afrocarpus falcatus* ripe seed 'cones' (one seed per cone).



Fig. 8. *Araucaria angustifolia* spent pollen cones.



Fig. 9. *Araucaria angustifolia* developing seed cones.

Africa were *Podocarpus henkelii*, *Podocarpus latifolius*, and *Afrocarpus falcatus*, the latter with spectacular crops of yellow fruit (Fig. 7).

South America was represented by some recently-cultivated monkey puzzle trees (*Araucaria araucana*), a splendid grove of Parana pine (*Araucaria angustifolia*) – already with reproductive male catkins (Fig. 8) and female seed cones (Fig. 9) – and some plots of *Podocarpus parlatorei*.

From New Guinea there were a few struggling klinki pine (*Araucaria hunsteinii*) and numerous rather straggly hoop pine (*Araucaria cunninghamii*). Apart from Norfolk Island pine previously mentioned, trees from the Pacific were Pacific kauri (*Agathis macrophylla*), and Cook pine (*Araucaria columnaris*).

The Gondwanan day finished with afternoon tea. Our thanks to Bec for hosting us and guiding us through the Gardens, and to Terry for sharing his knowledge of the restios.

#### Further reading on Restionaceae

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