

Anyone for *Coprosma*?

Maureen Young

A sign on the wall of a franchise café reads, “Circa 800 AD. An African farmer discovers the coffee berry after noticing his goats were hooked on its energising effects”. While I suspect that the veracity of this statement owes more to a publicity department than a scientific or historical study, coffee drinkers are familiar with the lift that a flat white or a long black imparts.

While I was in the early stages of my interest in things botanical I was fortunate to count Lucy Moore as my mentor, and one of the useful facts that she passed on to me was that *Coprosma* is in the Rubiaceae, the coffee family. Three experiences since I learned that fact have caused me to wonder about the energising effects of *Coprosma* species on browsing animals. Firstly, when Mt Tamahunga, west of Leigh, was overrun with goats, I noticed that the trunks of the tallest bushes of *Coprosma grandifolia* and *C. robusta* were scored with deep grooves where the teeth of goats had scraped the bark away, exposing an orange-coloured layer beneath. Secondly, an elderly lady who bequeathed a million dollar clifftop property at Algies Bay to the Rodney District Council, on condition that they would nurture her donkeys when she died, showed me that a sure way to attract the attention of her donkeys was to hold out some branches broken from the bushes of *C. macrocarpa* that surrounded their paddock (Fig. 1). And thirdly, when I explained this to Lisa Forester, botanist with the Northland Regional Council, she

said that if her horses were in a paddock surrounded by bush, they would put their heads over the fence and eat the *Coprosma* bushes before they ate anything else.

This causes one’s mind to meander along labyrinthine paths – did moa, unable to get high by the usual avian means, get a high by browsing on *Coprosma* bushes? If one goes along with the “moa browse” theory to explain why New Zealand has so many small-leaved divaricating shrubs, can one presume that the large number of small-leaved species of *Coprosma* evolved to discourage moa from browsing a favourite food?



Fig. 1. Donkeys getting their fix of *Coprosma macrocarpa*. Photo by John Millett, March 2018.

Water pennywort (*Hydrocotyle umbellata*) naturalised in Waiatarua Reserve, Remuera, Auckland

Mike Wilcox

Hydrocotyle umbellata L. (Araliaceae) is an aquatic plant native to North and Central America, and is variously known as water pennywort or dollar weed. I first became aware of this plant in Auckland when seeing it for sale as a culinary or medicinal herb at the Avondale Market (Wilcox 2003). From 2005 to 2017 numerous sightings, supported by herbarium specimens, have been made in various parts of the Auckland region (including Great Barrier Island), the habitats being damp lawns and wet grassy waste places. It seems likely that these patches have expanded vegetatively from original plantings or garden or aquarium discards. The first documented record of water pennywort naturalised (cultivation

escape) in Auckland was from the suburb of Mt Albert (de Lange & de Lange 2005). The Landcare Research checklist of seed plants (Wilton et al. 2016) assigns it the status ζ = exotic, occasional ('casual').

In October 2017 I came across a very extensive colony of water pennywort in Waiatarua Reserve in Remuera, Auckland (Fig. 1). It is not in the main central wetland area but on the northern boundary below the upper entrance to the reserve from Grand Drive in saturated ground where a stormwater drain enters the reserve. Associated plants included buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), lotus (*Lotus pedunculatus*) and various grasses – particularly