

Hidden treasures of the Dunedin Botanic Garden

At the end of July a small group of us were lucky enough to be given an insider's tour of the Dunedin Botanic Garden by Tom Myers. First stop was the impressive Rene Orchiston collection of endemic weaving flax varieties (*Phormium*), all with their traditional Maori names and differing colours, textures and traditional uses, and not yet listed on the visitor's guide. We walked on past the native wetland area, which abounded in sedges and rushes, and then carried on along the Lovelock bush track, where here and there were odd out-of-range kauri, *Agathis australis* and rewarewa (New Zealand honeysuckle, *Knightia excelsa*), that caught the eye amidst the second growth bush, once they were pointed out.

The track led us across the road to the welcome warmth of the propagation house, where we could marvel at strange plants from around the world, such as cycad palms of ancient lineage, insectivorous pitcher plants, sticky *Drosera* sundews, prickly cacti and various thorny plants that are so under-represented in New Zealand.

Tom told us about their Integrated Plant Management System, which aims to maintain plant health by using bio-controls and rapid removal of sick plants to minimise reliance on chemical sprays. The conversation turned to the consequences of ripening hormones that are sprayed over pea, barley and other crops so that they can be harvested in one swoop. The residue left on fresh pea straw used as mulch can cause garden plants to bolt and go to seed, so the trick is to let straw for mulching weather for a year before using on the garden.

The finishing treat was having Tom explain the International Seed Exchange programme that operates between botanic gardens around the world, and being shown the seeds and list of 100 species he had prepared for exchange. Interestingly, two of the species most requested from overseas are our tree fuchsia, *Fuchsia excorticata* and our fierce stinging nettle, *Urtica ferox*, both unusual in their genera in having tree forms.

Plant Profile: *Lembophyllum divulgum* (Hook. f. & Wils.) Lindb. By John Steel

Order: Bryales
Family: Lembophyllaceae

This is a fairly common moss to be found on the bark and exposed roots of trees, on rocks, on old logs in damp forested areas, e.g. in the mixed, broad-leaf forest in Leith Valley Dunedin, or in open grassland. The name stems from the Greek word, *lembos*, a small, round boat, and the Greek word, *phyllos*, a leaf, and refers to the almost round and deeply concave leaves, which cannot be flattened on a microscope slide without folding or tearing. The epithet, *divulgum*, refers to the irregular branching pattern. It is the only member of this small genus found in New Zealand. It is also very common in Australia.