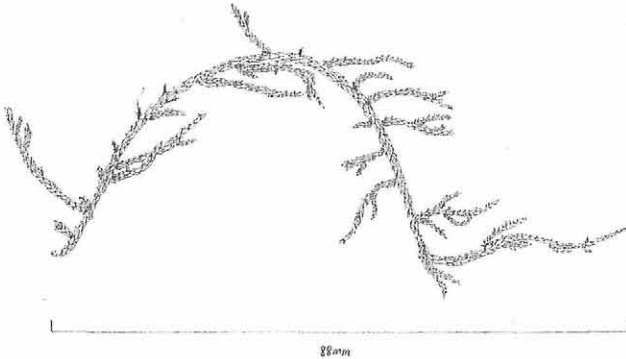


Forming dense, brownish to dark-green clumps, it is easily recognised by the string-like branches about 4-5cms long, formed by tightly overlapping leaves, with shorter secondary branches tapering to short blunt-pointed tips. The leaves are up to about 1mm in diameter and have a stout nerve or costa, extending to approximately half way up the leaf, easily seen with a x10 hand lens.

It is extremely variable according to its habitat. In forest, it reaches its maximum size and has a pretty, dark olive-green colour. In coastal grassland, such as that at Tunnel Beach, it can be very small, quite densely packed and almost black in colour



*Lembophyllum divulsum*, drawn by Inge Andrew

## BOOKS

### Book review – by John Steel

Simpson, P. (2000). *Dancing leaves: the story of New Zealand's cabbage tree, tī kōuka*.

324 pp. P/back. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch.

The year 2000 brought forth a goodly number of excellent natural history books and my choice for the year was heading towards the Malcolms' *Mosses and other bryophytes – an illustrated glossary*. However, a couple of days after Christmas I was given a copy of this excellent gem. The humble cabbage tree may lack the status and grandeur of the kauri and the podocarps but nevertheless, has a special place in the New Zealand psyche. Its significance to all in New Zealand is amply dealt with here.

This would have to be one of the best books written about one group of plants. The cover photograph of a large group of mature cabbage trees, standing in a field of exotic grasses and bracing themselves against the wind, evokes feelings of the struggle of the

native plant against the changes in its environment from outside forces. The first four chapters deal with the evolution, biogeography, description and ecology of the *Cordyline* genus, its history and its relationships with other families. The importance of tī kōuka to Maori covers the origin and history of the cabbage tree from a Maori perspective. Its importance as a cultural icon is dealt with, as are its many uses.

The cabbage tree formed an early impression on the Europeans, probably because of its exotic appearance, something quite foreign to their eyes. Just how much it affected the European consciousness is clearly covered in the following section and I was surprised at the extent of its use in almost every aspect of European life and culture.

The book finishes with a discussion of its present plight at the hands of sudden decline syndrome, which has had such dramatic effects, especially in the North Island, and ends with optimistic hopes for its future.

Simpson's text makes for easy reading without detracting from its technical content. The many photographs and illustrations are quite excellent. This is a book for reading cover to cover or for dipping into when the fancy strikes. I came away with the impression that Simpson is on familiar terms with every tree in the country and the book has left me with a much more reverent opinion of this, much taken for granted, New Zealand sentinel.

After this review was written, the book was recommended for, and subsequently won, the environmental section of the New Zealand Book Awards, and a well-deserved winner it was too.

This book is available from the University Bookshop. It is also available from Manaaki Whenua Press, at 20% off, which includes post and packing, if you are a member of BSO, and tell them.

Email: [MWPress@landcare.cri.nz](mailto:MWPress@landcare.cri.nz).

Online ordering website: <http://www.mwpress.co.nz>.

Post: Manaaki Whenua Press, PO Box 40, Lincoln 8152, NZ.

Tel +64 3 325 6700, Fax +64 3 325 2127

## **Book in Progress**

### **Southland Book of Records, by Lloyd Esler.**

Lloyd Esler is compiling the Southland Book of Records, modelled on the Guinness Book of records but better. He is including the Motu Totara photo from BSO Newsletter 26, p14, taken on our field trip last summer. This giant totara has probably the largest girth of any tree in Southland apart from the *Macrocarpa* at Gorge Road which is actually 12 *macrocarpas*, planted together as seedlings in a settler's garden. He never got around to planting them out