

## Letters

### Request for recent records of native mint

Native mint, *Mentha cunninghamii*, is a small herb that has suffered a severe decline in both numbers and distribution over the last fifty or so years. It has completely disappeared from some former sites. But it is still present locally, though rarely in good numbers, and this has meant that it has not been identified by botanists as a plant in need of conservation action.

My prime interest in it is as a possible host of a now rare day-flying moth, *Xanthorhoe bulbulata*. The moth once had a distribution that encompassed most of the South Island from sea level to above tree line and the lower half of the North Island. This colourful species was locally common, but only two specimens have been seen in the last fifty years. One was seen alive in Queenstown in 1979, the other dead in the Kawarau Gorge in 1990 (Patrick 2000).

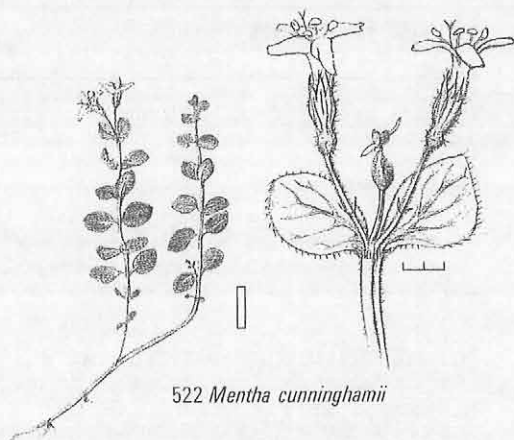
As other members of the genus *Xanthorhoe* in New Zealand feed exclusively on Brassicaceae, I spent a decade in vain looking for and examining such rare species as *Ischnocarpus novae-zelandiae* as a possible host. Like *Mentha* that species too had slipped through the cracks of rare plant conservation planning.

But recent examination of the world literature on the genus *Xanthorhoe* shows that as larvae they feed on other plant families as well. Included in this list of additional families is the genus *Mentha*. That, coupled with the fact that one of the sites where the moth was reported as common around 1900 stated that *Mentha* was common also, leads me to think that it is a strong candidate as the host plant of *X. bulbulata*.

What the moth probably needs, if it is still extant, is a good supply of this plant if it is indeed the larval host. I would be grateful for grid references of any such places especially in the Otago Lakes area.

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**Reference:** Patrick B H 2000  
Conservation status of two rare  
New Zealand geometrid moths.  
Science for Conservation 145.  
Department of Conservation,  
Wellington. 21 pp.



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**Fig.** Native mint, *Mentha cunninghamii*  
From: **Wetland Plants in New Zealand**,  
Peter Johnson and Pat Brooke, DSIR, 1989