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David Orlovich, Treasurer.

Drafting an Editorial Policy

Recently the committee have been debating the most appropriate editorial policy for our newsletter. We'd love to get feedback from you, the reader, about topics you'd like to see, or not see covered, and how broad, how deep and how controversially they should reach into the botanical arena. Next year we plan to draft an editorial policy for your consideration at the 2004 AGM.

A big thank you to all of you, from near and far, who have contributed so many interesting letters, articles, illustrations and anecdotes over the past 2 years. I have enjoyed publishing them and I hope you have enjoyed reading them and even found some of them helpful. So please keep those keyboards chattering, pens, pencils and paint brushes flowing so that we can have an even more informative, well illustrated and stimulating newsletter next year!

Allison Knight, editor

Articles

New Ways of Keeping up with plant names

Recently I have been working with numerous plant species lists from a range of sources and I have been quite surprised at the range of names used for some species. The most puzzling instances are where a species occurs twice in a list because of name changes. How can this happen? - some of you will say 'very easily'. Others of you will say 'how do you keep up?' and others again '**do you have to?**' or even '**do you have to?!**' Perhaps I should deal with these problems and questions in turn.

The first problem, of a name occurring two or more times in a list, arises from two similar causes. The most common is adding to an existing list and the person doing so not being aware of the name change or not making the check. The second cause is using an older list as a base for a new one (ie copying it from a spreadsheet or word processing file) and not making the check for recent name changes.

That leads to the first question - how do you keep up with the name changes? This may seem a trivial problem but certainly it is not. Volume one of the Flora (Allan 1961) is now over 40 years old and perhaps a third of the species in it have had a name change - some several times. Many of the species affected are the common ones. More recent publications, such as the Wetland plant book (Johnstone and Brooke 1989) or Hugh Wilson's Mt Cook field guide (latest edition 1996), may contain some of the updates but in recent years there has been a flood of name changes, many published in the New Zealand Journal of Botany.

So how do you find out about the changes? Landcare has database of plant names and although it does not include the ferns it can be used as an authoritative source. It has one drawback - if the name is an old one you won't find it. That is, you then have to find the new name somehow. Landcare also produced a list of current names for wild plants in New Zealand in 1995 which can provide the old name and lead you to the current name. It forms the base for the Landcare database (currently updated to 2000). Another useful source for updates is the New Zealand Botanical Society Newsletter. Ewen Cameron has produced a list of updates about every 1-2 years since 1994. But surely the easiest source is your tame expert. They are likely to appear on field trips and may have provided a species list using current names.

That still leaves the debate about what is the right name. A good discussion of this issue can be found in what is loosely referred to as Nomina Nova 4 (Connor and Edgar 1987). Some names even come into fashion and go again. I first learnt the common hound's tongue fern as *Microsorium diversifolium* it then became *Phymatodes* then *Phymatosorus*, changed its specific epithet and is now *Mircosorum pustulatus*. What next? *Coprosma grandiflora* became *C. australis* for a few years before reverting. The reasons for these changes can be quite obscure. Perhaps if we wait long enough any name will come back into fashion?

Sometimes there is good reason for disagreeing with a name change - many of the recent changes in the filmy ferns are not accepted because the basis on which the changes are made are not believed to be robust. The lumping of *Nertera* into *Coprosma* is not generally accepted because others believe the genera should be spit further. In *Hebe*, *Parahebe* and *Chionohebe* there is currently deep debate about generic bounds. Don't begin on the genus *Helichrysum* and related genera - that seems a real boar's nest. And the new orchid names? That's a battle of international proportions. You can always quote a name and its full authority but most people want to know what is the generally accepted name. For that the Landcare database can provide an authoritative source. But what of the undescribed species given tag names? Many are contained in a list prepared by Tony Druce and recently updated by DOC, but some are only of local use and perhaps should not be used, merely referred to the most similar species.

All of these solutions can mean a lot of work to find out if a name is still current or even more difficult, to find a current name for an old name, used perhaps 40 or 50 years ago. Similarly the problem remains of updating existing lists, even those only 5 or 10 years old, as species are added etc. One solution to this is to set up an electronic database for

species lists plus a master list for species names which, when changed, changes all the existing lists automatically. If it is done well it should be an easy task to find a correct current name from an old one and to produce a list with up-to-date names at any time.

An electronic version for the flora would be a much larger task but would provide a better solution to the problem of tracing name changes. It would need to be well structured to allow older names to be found. Such a database would also enable one to find a Latin name from a common name, especially for introduced species where common names are widely used. A trial electronic system like this is available for use in the Herbarium at the Department of Botany, University of Otago.

Graeme Jane, Tauranga

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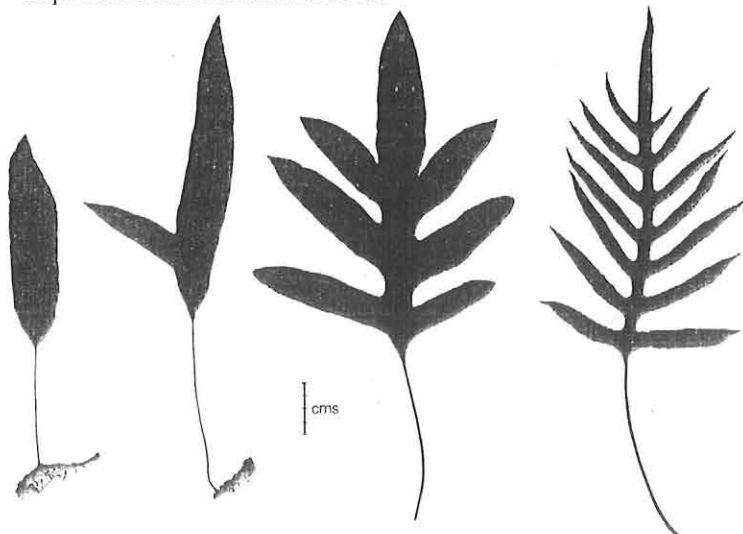


Fig. *Microsorium pustulatum* (hound's tongue fern), which was *Microsorium diversifolium* it then became *Phymatodes diversifolium* then *Phymatosorus diversifolium*. Range of juvenile and mature fronds from: PJ Brownsey & J Smith-Dodsworth, *New Zealand Ferns and Allied Plants*.2000.