

Revegetating the Rarities[©]

Terry Hatch

Joy Plants, 78 Jericho Rd, RD 2, Pukekohe

Email: hatch.clan@xtra.co.nz

THE ENVIRONMENT TODAY

Awareness of the environment has become all the rage and not before time. Politicians invented it just a few years ago, or so they would have us believe. For some of us it has always been a way of life. My first major revegetation was a silverbirch (*Betula pendula*) forest in our back garden in Essex, United Kingdom, at the age of seven. Sixty years later this planting must now be well past its use by date. There are other quite major plantings in that country I helped plant while an apprentice.

On arrival in New Zealand in 1963 I travelled north from Wellington. The population along the route were still in the slash and burn mode, and dark remains of once proud trees littered the eroding hillsides. In the intervening 40 years or so, things have changed, some for the better, but many places are still eroding and sending their precious cargo of topsoil down silted rivers to the sea. There is an awakening in certain areas that plants matter, even native plants!

BUSH HEALTH AND DIVERSITY

To look at native bush, much of it looks healthy. But take a closer look, and often the number of species present is low with only the very tough few. Many of the revegetation projects are planted on the same lines — a few number of species that are easily propagated, having a high survival rate when planted by the inexperienced even with the planter bag on (the Prime Minister on TV). So much more teaching is still needed.

Joy Plants has access to many thousands of hectares of farmland that have large areas of fenced bush, but the sad fact remains much of this valuable resource is being degraded by constant grazing from goats, deer, wild pigs, possums, rats, rabbits, and farm stock. This results in park-like areas of large trees and no undergrowth, which is not a long-term situation. After large storms, masses of leaf and branch debris fall and, instead of turning into mulch and promoting undergrowth development, are consumed by browsing animals. There is also the constant danger of local authority spray contractors and various mowers, slashes, and the like that small rare roadside native plant populations have to contend with. Most of our native birds need undergrowth, as do all insects, lizards, and snails, and it is essential that this undergrowth biomass is built up and retained.

In a short article by H. Carse, "Flora of the Manuku District" (part of our area), read to the Auckland Institute 2 Sept. 1901, a large list of plants was mentioned that occurred in "great luxuriance," most of which are now hard to find, rare, or extinct. It is imperative that we add as many of these smaller unnoticed plants to the eco-plantings that are being planted by all and sundry and make this bandwagon really worthwhile even if they take more time and care to grow. After all is that not what we I.P.P.S. folk are all about?

Table 1. Some species that should have greater attention.

Coprosma crassifolia

Coprosma rigida

Coprosma rhamnoides

Coprosma rotundifolia

Coprosma virescens

Dracophyllum arboreum var. *arcuatum*

Dracophyllum latifolium

Elingamita johnsonii

Hydrocotyle dissecta

Libertia grandiflora 'Gentle Annie'

Melicytus micranthus

Muehlenbeckia astonii

Olearia solandri

Pittosporum anomalum

Pittosporum obcordatum

Pittosporum pimeleoides

Pittosporum turneri

Pittosporum umbellatum

Pratia perpusilla

Pseudopanax ferox
