



## **NEW ZEALAND PLANT CONSERVATION NETWORK**

**E-NEWSLETTER: NO 2. JANUARY 2004**

Please send news items or events to [events@nzpcn.org.nz](mailto:events@nzpcn.org.nz)

**Happy New Year and welcome to the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network**

Work is progressing well on the development of the Network. The first few months have been taken up with getting the administrative systems of the network up and running, and prioritising what we wish to achieve in the first year. The Wellington based committee members have been meeting regularly and a business planning workshop was held in Wellington in late November for all Council members. That meeting focused on the workshop summary report that was recently emailed to you. We would appreciate some feedback on these priorities and any ideas from you as to what we should tackle first.

If you have any questions about the Network you can contact Council members directly (contact details are listed in the '*Key People*' section of the website) or email the Network [info@nzpcn.org.nz](mailto:info@nzpcn.org.nz)

### **Membership**

We now have well over 140 members from 5 countries and the number is increasing rapidly. Up until now this newsletter has gone to a wide range of people who have shown interest, and support for the network. From now on, however, it will only go to members. So if you are not a member please log onto the website and fill in the application form.

### **Help needed with running the Network?**

There is plenty of work to be done over the next year and to achieve this we need network members to give of their time and expertise. We would be very keen to hear from anyone interested in helping us. In particular we would appreciate help with:

- Marketing the network and increasing membership (contact Mike Oates [derenzy-oates@clear.net.nz](mailto:derenzy-oates@clear.net.nz))
- Assisting with the website development, and in particular providing technical information and writing plant descriptions. (contact John Sawyer - [jsawyer@doc.govt.nz](mailto:jsawyer@doc.govt.nz))

### **Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and botanic gardens**

At the Botanic Gardens of Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) inaugural conference in Geelong, Victoria last month, discussions took place over progress towards the goals in the global strategy. In particular, concern was expressed over the lack of commitment at the state and national level to adoption of the strategy. A resolution was unanimously passed which focussed in particular on the roles that could be played by botanic gardens.

## FURTHERING THE GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR PLANT CONSERVATION IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

That this Congress recommends to the Council of Heads of Australian Botanic Gardens, the Australian Network for Plant Conservation Inc, and the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network that they:

1. Develop an alliance of interest to further knowledge of, and commitment to, the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation;
2. Continue to seek meetings with and between governments to
  - a. Brief conservation agencies on the GSPC
  - b. Facilitate linkages between CBD related units of governments and the plant conservation related units
  - c. Scope the GSPC goals and targets and discuss possible governmental responses
3. Maintain close liaison with Botanic Garden Conservation International and IUCN on the GSPC
4. Seek dialogue with relevant NGO's , including others within the region, and with regional botanic gardens with a view to a coordinated approach
5. Encourage major botanic gardens to ensure that at least one senior living collection records officer is also briefed on the GSPC
6. Evaluate the need and feasibility of developing shared registers and information systems of the live/seed collections of conservation significance held in Australian and NZ botanic gardens.
7. Pursue funding options to resource GSPC related actions, jointly or if separately then in coordination.

Mike Oates and John Sawyer from the network attended the congress and will be following up on these issues. In March 2004, a meeting of the Council of Heads of Australian Botanic Gardens (CHABG) takes place in Wellington. We are planning to organise a session on GSPC as part of this meeting and bring botanic garden managers from around New Zealand together to see how we can work together on the goals and targets in the strategy.

### **Upcoming events**

If you have important events or news that you would like publicised via this newsletter please email the Network ([events@nzpcn.org.nz](mailto:events@nzpcn.org.nz)).

**Coastal Dune Vegetation Network – conference 2004.** To be held in Wellington from 10-13 March. For programme and registration details see

<http://www.forestresearch.co.nz/topic.asp?topic=2004%20Coastal%20Dune%20Vegetation%20Network%20Conference&title=10%20%2D%2013%20March%202004>

**Wetland Symposium - Restoring Wetlands – a practical forum, Wellington, 27 – 28 February 2004.** Optional field trip 29 February 2004. Registration forms available from [wetlands@gw.govt.nz](mailto:wetlands@gw.govt.nz). Please complete form and return to: Restoring Wetlands, c/o Greater Wellington, P O Box 11-646, Wellington or fax to 04 385 6960. Deadline for registration: **Friday 13 February 2004.**

## Letter to the editor

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24 October 2003

To the Editor

The endemic ecology of Mt Burnett, near Collingwood, North-West Nelson, desperately needs the help of New Zealand's Plant Conservation Network.

Over 20 years ago Tony Druce discovered what he believed to be new plant species growing on the dolomitic karst areas of Mt Burnett. In 1997 and 1998 Peter de Lange and Dr Peter Heenan described and named two endemic plants: *Carex dolomitica* and *Myrsine argentea*. An unnamed bronze-leaved *Gingidia* looks to also be found only on Mt Burnett and in a small area on Mt Arthur. There is also continued debate between botanists as to other potential endemics: a *Melicytus*, and a *Hebe*. Clearly more research is needed.

Regardless, the dolomitic karst vegetation of Mt Burnett is unique – there is simply no comparable area of high grade dolomitic marble in New Zealand. On Mt Burnett, dolomitic marble forms a karst landscape where a unique composition of wind-sculpted forest grows on the (slightly) flatter areas that can hold soil, and the exposed bluffs host an equally unique shrubland. In both vegetation types, the endemic *Myrsine* is conspicuous, whilst the exposed karst forms the only natural habitat for *Carex dolomitica*.

A combination of Mt Burnett's geology, strong winds and impressive rainfall has pushed evolution in different directions. What inspires me about this mountain is that when you look at many of the plants, it is clearly a place of 'evolution in action' where some plants look like their relatives in neighbouring areas, but you can also see they are evolving to become quite different.

Other plants that make up Mt Burnett's fascinating forest and shrublands are endemic to the northwest Nelson region, others have a smaller distribution in surrounding mountains and valleys. These include *Brachyglottis hectorii*, *Libertia mooreae*, and an unusual *Phormium* variant.

Mt Burnett also has possibly the world's largest population of *Coprosma obconica*, now ranked as in 'gradual decline' by the Department of Conservation. A recently published paper by Peter de Lange and Dr Rhys Gardner stated that with regard to the conservation of this species:

*...it is estimated that between 5% and 30% of the national population will decline over the next 10 years, particularly if dolomite mining continues at one of the largest populations, Mt Burnett.*

Mt Burnett has been mined for dolomite since 1959. Today multi-national mining company OMYA owns the mining licence on Mt Burnett, which expires in 2006.

Historical mining has wiped out 60% of the endemic forest. Fortunately the shrubland has fared a little better.

The threatened status of the Mt Burnett carex has been assessed as 'nationally critical', the endemic myrsine as 'nationally vulnerable' and the unnamed *Gingidia* as 'nationally endangered' by the Department of Conservation Threatened Plant Panel. The threat to the existence of these species comes predominantly because of human influence (mining) and following the mining, competition by weeds introduced by mining methods and the after affect of leaving large areas of bare ground.

In 2001, OMYA cut a seventh bench into the side of Mt Burnett. This, they argued would allow them 20 years worth of dolomite mining. But not to be satisfied, OMYA applied to push a road beyond their mining licence area and into forest park land that would angle up the slope to giving mining access to higher reaches of Mt Burnett. The road would cross a nationally significant geological area where coal measure, dolomite and limestone meet and destroy more endemic plant habitat.

OMYA's 21-year mining licence expires in 2006. It doesn't need the access road unless their mining licence is extended past that date. We have no way of knowing if this will happen, so why jeopardise important conservation land? The Nelson Conservator, Neil Clifton and the Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter are likely to make a decision over the access road application before the end of the year.

The precedent this sets is vitally important. If DOC give the thumbs up to the road, they will be acting against their own mandate: to conserve and advocate for the conservation of New Zealand's native biodiversity. It would also contradict a 'supply agreement' with the Government to prevent 'avoidable extinctions' – in fact DOC could be seen as speeding up the extinctions of the rare plants they are supposed to protect for an unnecessary road.

OMYA certainly doesn't have a clean environmental slate. For more information on OMYA's global operations see [www.vce.org](http://www.vce.org) - this website acts as a global watchdog on the multi-national company.

The Dolomite Action Group (DAG) was set up in October 2003 by a group of people who genuinely care about Mt Burnett and have faced years of frustration and evasion from both OMYA and the Department of Conservation. Our aim is to initially stop the proposed access road and to ensure the dolomite mining on Mt Burnett stops at the end of current mining licence in February 2006. All of Mt Burnett deserves to be included in the boundaries of Kahurangi National Park .We can be contacted at: [saventburnett@wildmail.com](mailto:saventburnett@wildmail.com)

The Dolomite Action Group looks forward to any help from the Threatened Plant Network. As an interim, concerned individuals can write to the Minister of Conservation, requesting a thorough independent conservation review of the Mt Burnett operation and urge him to turn down the access road proposal by OMYA.

Yours Sincerely  
Dean Baigent-Mercer  
Spokesperson  
Dolomite Action Group