

New initiative to protect New Zealand's flora

The New Zealand Plant Conservation Network is a major new initiative to halt the continuing decline in indigenous plant life in New Zealand and to raise awareness of the importance of New Zealand as a global centre of plant diversity. We launched the Network in August 2003 to build on the success of other international plant networks such as the Australian Network for Plant Conservation and Planta Europa, and to lead New Zealand's implementation of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC).

The Network has grown rapidly and its members now include institutions such as botanic gardens, plant nurseries, government and non-government agencies, community groups and universities. Individual members include botanists, students and landowners. The mission of the Network is to:

- "Promote indigenous plant conservation in New Zealand and throughout Australasia;
- Collaborate to protect and restore New Zealand's indigenous plant life and their natural habitats and associated species;
- Disseminate information about the taxonomy, biology, ecology and status of indigenous plant species and communities in New Zealand and to promote activities to protect them throughout their natural range."

Our immediate focus is the targets of the GSPC. At the inaugural meeting we held workshops to address targets such as 5 (conservation of important areas for plant diversity), 8 (*ex situ* conservation of threatened plants) and 14 (education and public awareness). A report from these workshops with recommendations for action was published in February 2004; copies are available for sale (NZ\$15 + postage) or can be downloaded from the Network's website.

The Network is now working to:

- Complete a national stock-take of plant conservation education in New Zealand;
- Start a programme to identify and then conserve Important Plant Areas in New Zealand;
- Develop a national *ex-situ* repository of threatened plants for use in species recovery work;
- Gain greater legal protection for indigenous plants (at present plants outside protected areas have no legal protection).

The Network is developing a plant conservation information system on its website. This provides information about all threatened plants in New Zealand including descriptions, photographs, habitat requirements and propagation techniques. It also provides search engines for plant conservation literature, funding options, a list of Network members and links to other sources of plant information. The site also provides tools to record threatened plant observations and to download lists of New Zealand's threatened plants. A 'News and Events' section will go live in August. Over 20,000 people have used the site so far and we have funding to develop the site further over the next three years. We also send members an electronic newsletter every month.

Other initiatives include an annual conference, which this year was held at the Auckland Regional Botanic Gardens on 7 August. We also plan greater use of the website to raise awareness about common and threatened indigenous plants (including cryptogams) and fungi and the reasons for their decline.

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