

Websites

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***Davallia tasmanii* Field subsp. *tasmanii* in my garden**

Maureen Young

In 1887 a government expedition to annex the Kermadec Islands gave Thomas Cheeseman, curator of the Auckland Museum, an opportunity to study the flora and fauna there. On the return journey the party visited the Three Kings Islands, and Cheeseman found a fern growing abundantly in dry scrub, creeping on the ground or climbing the bases of rocks and trees, that was new to the New Zealand flora and endemic to the islands. After his marriage in 1889 Cheeseman returned to the islands, taking his new bride as his assistant – an unusual honeymoon for a Victorian lady (Goulding 1996). The fern was subsequently named *Davallia tasmanii* by H.C. Field (Field 1890), the specific name celebrating the explorer Abel Tasman, who spied the island group off North Cape on Twelfth Night, 1643, this being the celebration of the day the biblical three kings visited the Christ child.

The fern is notable for having thick rhizomes densely clothed with chestnut scales, glabrous stipes, and roughly triangular-shaped fronds that are smooth and leathery with cup-shaped indusia (Smith-Dodsworth & Brownsey 2000). Although

abundant on the Kings, because of the restricted habitat it is given the threat classification of At Risk - Naturally Uncommon.

In 1962 Ross Michie, a retired farmer from Kaitaia and knowledgeable northern botanist, was fortunate enough to visit the Three Kings, and he returned with a rhizome of *D. tasmanii*, which he successfully propagated in his garden. In 1985 my late partner, Frank Hudson, and I were introduced to Ross by Lucy Moore, and I was given a cutting of the fern to take home. Although it is recommended that it is grown in light shade in fairly dry conditions, I just planted it on the shady side of my Warkworth house and it has thrived there for 35 years among the mint and *Adiantum aethiopicum*. It gives me pleasure to connect my plant to Ross Michie and his 1962 visit to the Three Kings Islands.

This dry summer-autumn my davallia was showing signs of stress, with fronds browning and with no new growth, so I made sure that it was periodically doused with a share of my soapy shower-water. Now that conditions have become a little damper it



Fig. 1: *Davallia tasmanii* and the author's back-doorstep. Photos by: Vivienne Paterson, 30 May 2020.



Fig. 2: *Davallia tasmanii* showing the pouched indusia.

has blossomed, so to speak, and produced a mass of bright green foliage (Fig. 1). Most of the fronds are fertile, with the marginal pouched indusia (Fig. 2) giving them an attractive three-dimensional appearance. The rhizomes are becoming attached to the concrete-block foundations of my house and to the concrete back-doorstep. When the time comes for my house to be repainted I will be faced with a dilemma – what will succeed, my fondness for my *davallia* or practical common sense? I suspect that the fern might be the victor.

Although there are roughly 40 species of *Davallia* world-wide, and for a short time *Leptolepia novae-zelandiae* was placed in this genus, for the better part of a hundred years it was thought that this fern was the only example of the genus in New Zealand. However, in the early 1980s a young Peter Bellingham, while surveying the flora of Puketi

Forest in Northland, found a rhizomatous fern growing on some exposed cliffs in the forest. Thinking that it looked to be a strange species of *Rumohra* (not a foolish presumption, as that genus is sometimes included in the Davalliaceae) he showed it to Anthony Wright, at that time botanist at the Auckland Museum and President of Bot Soc. As Anthony had just returned from a visit to the Kings he recognised it as a species of *Davallia*, presumably *D. tasmanii* (Wright 1985; pers. comm.). At first the disjunct distribution was a puzzle, but closer study has shown that there are sufficient differences to classify it as a separate subspecies, and it is now known as *Davallia tasmanii* subsp. *cristata* von Konrat, Braggins et de Lange (von Konrat et al. 1999). Its threat status is Nationally Critical, as it has never been found elsewhere, and on the few fertile fronds that have been found the spores have all been sterile (de Lange 2020).

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Auntie Lucy and me: My personal memories of Dr Lucy Beatrice Moore MBE, DSc, FLS, FRSNZ (1906–1987)

Maureen Young

As a war-time baby with my father, Harry Best, overseas and my mother, Inez Best, unable to drive (not that there were tyres and petrol for private cars), our world shrank to where our mother could walk with two small children in tow, so friends and neighbours were particularly important in our lives. We were fortunate that our nearest neighbours on Pulham Road, Warkworth, were Stan and Sylvia Moore, brother and sister-in-law of botanist Lucy Moore. Between our two houses were our cow paddock, a small market garden and Moore's bush. As soon as I could toddle that far I would set off barefooted along an often muddy path, with blackberries and gorse to dodge, to play with the Moore's son, Kerry (Fig. 1). My older sister never let me forget that one day Kerry had to bring me home because I had wet my pants. The bush, with scrubby cut-over vegetation that would almost qualify as gumland scrub, was our favourite playground. I could name tea-tree, mingimingi,



Fig. 1. The author, Maureen Young nee Best (front right), with her friend Kerry Moore and others from the Pulham Rd gang, 1944. Kerry and Maureen in white sailor suits. Photo by Inez Best.