A REMARKABLE OCCURRENCE IN A PUBLIC PARK -

YOANIA AMONG THE BEER BOTTLES - - - E.D.H.

On 27 December 1966 Mr. Horsman went to Kirk's Bush, Papakura, and found beneath the taraire there, 3 flowering stems of Yoania australis. I must confess that it would never have occurred to me to look for any orchid in a public park - let alone one so rare and touchy as Yoania. Mr. Horsman is to be complimented on his perspicacity - how little we really know about the distribution of plants in New Zealand.

On 21 January 1967 Mr. Horsman, with Mr. Beever and E.D.H., went again to Kirk's Bush, and there among the newspapers, chocolate wrappers, odd beer bottles and associated clutter, found some 45 stems with a total of 91 flowers, most of them fertilised with well developed seed capsules. I noted only 5 open flowers, and it seems probable that the species is self fertile, although there were numerous small insects crawling about among the leaf debris, and these cannot be entirely ruled out as pollinating agents. In one area several smallish brown mushroom-like fungi with gills were noted among the orchids, but I cannot say whether they were connected or not. Yoania is a rhizome with many branches, and the flower stems tend to occur in small groups, each of which represents a single plant which is of course out of sight beneath the surface. The largest plant thus found had 9 flower stems with a total of 30 flowers arranged thus - 5.4.4.4. 3.3.3.2.2.

I would like to stress the fact that Yoania australis is rare. Apart from this latest find at Papakura, it is known from only 2 localities. Waipoua Forest, where a single plant was found in 1955; and Glorit, where several colonies occur. As Miss Campbell has shown, Yoania is an epi-parasite, dependent on and connected to the taraire by means of a mycorrhizal fungus, the hyphae of which penetrate the roots of the taraire, and swarm round and penetrate the rhizome of the orchid. Yoania cannot therefore be cultivated in the ordinary sense, and to dig up a plant is to destroy it. Inspect it, admire it, photograph it. Wonder if you will why the botanists get excited about it - but please leave it where it is. What with the bottle parties, the courting couples and boys on bicycles, it has enough to cope with. I rejoice to think that the Botanical Society was originally involved in the preservation of Kirk's Bush. They were protecting more than they knew, and I for one am grateful.

There are other, more or less undisturbed remnants of taraire forest around Auckland, and I imagine that any or all of them may shelter the orchid, which appears above ground for roughly 6 weeks of the year - from mid-December to the end of January. Might be worth a search!