

MATEA ROAD WETLAND, RANGITAIKI

Paul Cashmore

This report is based on a trip by the Rotorua Botanical Society on Sunday 2 September 2001 and a subsequent visit by myself and Peter de Lange in April 2005.

Along the Napier-Taupo Highway there are many little known natural areas. A small ephemeral wetland on crown land on the corner of Matea Rd and the Napier-Taupo Highway (NZMS 260 U19 097 493), highly visible from the road, is one of the more accessible areas. It consists of a small wetland on both sides of the highway surrounded, mainly on the southern side of the road, by extensive areas of monoao (*Dracophyllum subulatum*) shrubland. Our focus was on the smaller area adjoining Matea Rd on the northern side of the highway. There was little of botanical interest on the southern side when the Botanical Society visited in 2001 as the area had been completely burnt, destroying a large area of monoao shrubland, in a fire which had swept along that side of the highway the previous year. Thankfully the small remnant we were botanising on our recent visit had been spared from the flames.

Several vegetation types were present as follows:

- Open water areas with stands of *Baumea arthrophylla* and *Eleocharis sphacelata*. When visited in April 2005 the ephemeral wetland was nearly dry with no open water. *Myriophyllum pedunculatum* dominated the dried up open water areas along with some *Lilaeopsis novae-zelandiae*.
- *Lepidosperma australe* sedgeland communities, which were abundant in the damp areas, surrounded the seasonally dry open water areas.

The sedgeland graded into large areas of monoao shrubland, the predominant vegetation type in these cold frosty areas. Species commonly associated with this vegetation type were also present. Silver tussock (*Poa cita*) and Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) were

common in the understorey along with occasional *Pimelea prostrata*, exotic mouse ear hawkweed (*Hieracium pilosella*) and lichens (*Cladia* and *Cladonia* spp.).

Amongst the monoao shrubland localised areas of dense tangle fern (*Gleichenia dicarpa*)-(monoao)-(manuka) fernland occupied some of the damp areas. On the margins, particularly near the road, were small areas of exotic grassland comprised predominantly of *Agrostis stolonifera* and *Schedonorus phoenix*.

Scattered throughout the area but mainly within the monoao shrubland were occasional plants of *Oxothamnus leptophyllus*, *Coprosma cheesemanii*, *Coprosma acerosa*, *Coprosma propinqua* and *Coprosma* “taylorae”.

Near the wetland area two plant species currently listed as nationally threatened by de Lange *et al.* (2004) have been found since the 2001 visit. These are *Hypericum* aff. *japonicum* (Chronically Threatened - Gradual Decline) (Nic Singers pers. comm.) and *Carex rubicunda* (At Risk - Range Restricted). The native grass *Deyeuxia* aff. *quadrisseta* (At Risk - Range Restricted) was also noted further in on the margins of the (*Gleichenia dicarpa*)-(monoao)-(manuka) fernland near the monoao shrubland.

Unfortunately, several serious plant pests were also present in the area. Small trees of *Pinus contorta* were scattered throughout the monoao shrubland. Most of these trees were probably about 5 years old in 2001 having regenerated following felling of the parent trees. The young trees were subsequently felled in 2004 by DOC staff. Gorse and broom were also locally present in the monoao shrubland, probably having established from the extensive seed sources of both these species along the margins of the Napier-Taupo Highway. A small area of silver birch (*Betula pendula*) at the western end of the wetland is visible from the highway. These trees are reasonably well established but do not appear to be spreading rapidly. There are also several grey willow trees along the highway margin where it borders the wetland. These plant pest species have not had a significant impact on the conservation values of this site so far.

This remnant, which has unfortunately been separated from extensive areas of shrubland to the south by the construction of the Napier-Taupo Highway, would have once been part of a much larger area of monoa shrubland which stretched throughout the Rangitaiki area and right across the Kaingaroa Plateau. Most of this habitat has been cleared for pine plantations or agriculture. In the Rangitaiki area large farms now dominate the flat plains.

Ironically it was also the highway that undoubtedly saved this area from being burnt. As the area on the southern side of the highway will take many years to recover from the devastating fire this site will serve as an important seed source of native species naturally re-establishing in the burnt areas. It also serves as a very visible reminder to passing motorists of what much of the indigenous vegetation of the Rangitaiki area looked like before it was cleared for farming and forestry.

REFERENCES

P. J. de Lange; D. A. Norton; P. B. Heenan; S. P. Courtney; B. P. J. Molloy; C. C. Ogle; B. D. Rance; P. N. Johnson; R. Hitchmough 2004. Threatened and uncommon plants of New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 42:45-76.

MATEA ROAD WETLAND

VASCULAR PLANT SPECIES CHECKLIST

Nic Singers

(with some additions by Paul Cashmore and Peter de Lange 2005)

(NZMS 260 U19 097 493)

Ferns

Blechnum minus
Blechnum penna-marina
Gleichenia dicarpa
Lycopodium fastigiatum
Polystichum sp. (previously *P. vestitum*)
Sticherus cunninghamii

Gymnosperms

**Picea* sp.
 **Pinus contorta*

Dicotyledonous trees and shrubs

**Betula pendula*
Coprosma “taylorae”
Coprosma acerosa var. *brunnea*
Coprosma cheesemanii
Coprosma decurva
Coprosma propinqua
Coprosma propinqua x *C. robusta*
 **Cytisus scoparius*
Dracophyllum subulatum
Gaultheria antipoda
 **Hypericum androsaemum*
Leptospermum scoparium
Leucopogon fraseri
Oxothamnus leptophyllus
Pimelea prostrata
 **Salix cinerea*
 **Salix fragilis*
 **Salix* sp.
 **Ulex europaeus*

Dicotyledonous lianes

**Rubus fruticosus* agg.

Dicotyledonous herbs

**Achillea millefolium*
Celmisia gracilentia
Centella uniflora
 **Cerastium fontanum*
Drosera sp.
Geranium microphyllum
Geranium sessiliflorum
Glossostigma elatinoides
Gnaphalium paludosum
Gonocarpus micranthus
 **Hieracium pilosella*
Hypericum aff. *japonicum*
 **Hypericum perforatum*
 **Hypochoeris radicata*
Leucopogon suaveolens
Lilaeopsis novae-zealandiae
Lilaeopsis ruthiana
 **Lotus pedunculatus*
 **Mycelis muralis*
Myriophyllum pedunculatum
Pernettya macrostigma
Pratia perpusilla
 **Prunella vulgaris*
Pseudognaphalium luteoalbum
Raoulia albosericea
Scleranthus biflorus
Selliera microphylla

Monocotyledonous trees

Cordyline australis

Orchids

Thelymitra cyanea
Thelymitra longifolia

Grasses

**Agrostis stolonifera*
Cortaderia fulvida
Deyeuxia aff. *quadriseta*
Deyeuxia avenoides
Hierochloa redolens
**Holcus lanatus*
Lachnagrostis lyallii?
Lachnagrostis striata
Poa anceps
Poa cita
**Schedonorus phoenix*

Sedges

Baumea arthropphylla
Carex rubicunda
Eleocharis sphacelata
Isolepis sp.
Lepidosperma australe
Oreobolus pectinatus
Uncinia rubra

Rushes and allied plants

**Juncus bulbosus*
Juncus novae-zelandiae

Other Monocotyledonous herbs

Phormium tenax