

***ASTELIA GRANDIS* -**
A NEW SPECIES FOR THE ROTORUA LAKES ECOLOGICAL DISTRICT

John F. F. Hobbs

While heading back to the vehicle from our expedition to Kakapiko Bush (see Cashmore (2007) in this issue) we got lost - well we knew where we were but due to re-roading during logging operations and maps with poorly defined walking tracks, instead of leaving the forest down Five Mile Gate Road we took Five Mile Gate North Road. While walking down this road Paul noticed a rather large *Astelia* growing in the narrow wetland and the race was on to spout forth the species name. The amateur won (Presidential Privilege). There was no mistaking *Astelia grandis* with its long broad stiffly arching pale green leaves. The road eventually petered out and we had to take to recently planted cutover pine forest then open Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) forest before struggling through Himalayan honeysuckle (*Leycesteria formosa*), blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) and Darwin's barberry (*Berberis darwinii*) to the road and the vehicle.

The significance of this find was not immediately realised and it was not until two days later when the author thought, at some ungodly hour in the morning, that this species might not have been recorded in the District before. Out of bed and into the Special Issue No 1 (Ecroyd C.E.; Clarkson B.D.; Wilcox M.D. (1990)) – no mention. Fired up the PC and logged into the National Forestry (old Forest Research Institute) Herbarium data base – again no records. Apparently, nobody had shown any intimate botanical interest in this tucked-away-wetland.

A revisit to the wetland, which for the lack of a better name I'll call Five Mile Road North Swamp, showed that there were some forty clumps of *A. grandis* over a distance of approximately 400 metres. The swamp varies from five metres wide upstream to approximately 100 metres at its widest some two hundred metres south-east of State Highway (SH) 5. The clumps of *Astelia* were fairly evenly scattered over the swamp area

to within 100 metres of SH 5 to the north-west. A leaf and dead seed head were vouchered in the National Forestry Herbarium (NZFRI 26335).

Some two hundred metres to the south-west of this, is the much more widely known Five Mile Gate Swamp (FMGS). The author had visited the perimeter of this swamp several times in the past with the aim of drawing up a species list but had seen no species of *Astelia* at all. Paul was very sceptical when I told him that there was no *A. grandis* in the FMGS. To prove a point we visited this swamp on the way home after a field trip up Rainbow Mountain, taking a step ladder with us to help look over the Himalayan honeysuckle, blackberry, broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), around this swamp.

REFERENCE

Ecroyd C.E.; Clarkson B.D.; Wilcox M.D. 1990. Annotated List of Vascular Plants in the Rotorua Lakes Ecological District. *Rotorua Botanical Society Special Issue* No. 1.

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