

New Zealand Plant Collection Register: An Update

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New Zealand is very rich in both indigenous and adventive flora. It is important to know the extent of this resource, where specific species are located, and how vulnerable they are. This is especially true of plants in cultivation.

Since 1988 a small group of Institute members have been working on a register of plant collections of all sizes held in New Zealand. This work is a first step to documenting the extent of the plant genetic resource. As such it is simply a quantitative exercise, getting all the information together in one place. The register was initially compiled in March 1992 from returns received from a questionnaire sent out during 1991. Since that time two further updates have been published with the latest register containing details of 400 generic collections and 97 theme collections.

DETAILS OF REGISTER

The current register contains basic information on the collection, its size, and who holds it. It also indicates the status of records for each collection. It is best seen as an informal working list. Information recorded is that handed on by the owner. There has been no research on the collection, correct identification, etc.

The register contains information received from a publicity campaign run during 1992 as well as from the work of two other organisations:

1) The Herb Federation have done much valuable work and started publishing lists of national herb collections. These collections are detailed in the publication "Individual Plant Collections 1992."

2) Marion Mackay in association with the International Dendrology Society (IDS) carried out a survey of 17 tree genera which appeared in the publication "A survey and evaluation of selected exotic tree genera in private collections in New Zealand (1990)."

The initial survey shows the extent of the genetic resource and how much of it is in private hands. Clearly the survey is still far from complete and further important collections will be unearthed.

USES OF REGISTER

The register will have many uses. It will be of value to nurserymen and gardeners seeking plants new to their range. It will show what germplasm is already in the country, thus avoiding the importation of new plants and the associated risks of pest and disease importation. plant breeders will see it as a list for available germplasm for breeding programmes. Most importantly, however, it will act as a guide to the vulnerability of each species or cultivar.

For instance, in the IDS work it was found that some species existed in only one or two collections and there were only 2 or 3 plants in the country. Clearly action is needed to prevent these at risk plants from disappearing. This is especially so when you realise that many of the collections are in one arboretum, Eastwoodhill near Gisborne.

The Register will also draw attention to important collections and ensure that where collections are under threat action can be taken quickly to save or transfer them to a new owner.

FUTURE PLANS

The Register will never be complete as plant holdings change constantly. However, it is hoped that now it has been started it will prove a focal point and enthusiasts will see gaps and help us keep it up to date and as useful as possible. This stage, however, has really only given us a broad view of the extent of the resource. The next stage which we are starting is to gather much more qualitative information on specific collections. From there we can continue and set up some sort of simple national collection criteria, along the lines of the NCCPG Scheme in Britain.

Recently the NZ Lottery Grant Board made a grant to the RNZIH to investigate the publication of more detailed information. This work is currently being carried out by horticulture students at Massey University as a research topic. This work has two aims: (1) Assessment of suitable software for a national plant collections database, (2) More detailed survey of specific species and their collection holders. For instance, a survey of *Metrosideros* species and current collection holders.

During 1994 an initial register will be published containing the basic information on each collection plus more detailed information on species. This is sure to throw up many more collections as well as bring up inaccuracies in the initial list. The best way to find out what's wrong is often to publish.

If a wide range of people connected with plants in New Zealand make a contribution, whether they be botanists, plant collectors, breeders, nurserymen or home gardeners, we can produce and maintain a working index of our plant resource which will benefit both ourselves and will help to ensure the continued existence of as many plants as possible.

If you have information to contribute to the Register please contact:

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