



# LAKE WAIRARAPA

—its natural values include plants

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***Myriophyllum propinquum***: the common, native water milfoil occurs widely on the lake-shore as stunted plants, and in swamps and pools in this more upright form; feathery stigmas of female flowers are visible.

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Lake Wairarapa and its adjacent wetlands have become increasingly important in the current debate on uses for New Zealand's wetlands. To date, the conservation emphasis on Lake Wairarapa has been on the spectacular: the 73 or more species of birds, some of which occur in large numbers. This has tended to over-shadow the presence of a fascinating native flora which is at risk from development also.

**T**HE Wairarapa Catchment Board plans to take some 2600 ha of the lake and its eastern shores to establish 43 dairy farms. Agricultural development has already removed or otherwise modified much of the wetland of this district. If more of the wetlands are taken, how will existing natural values

of such lands be affected? Are these values represented on existing farmlands, or can they be substituted by artificial wetlands in new developments? Even if new habitat can be created for all the wetland birds, will this provide also for the full range of other animals and plants currently in the wetlands?

## The patterns of vegetation

The lake and its shores have a complex pattern of plant communities, reflecting differences in physical conditions and the direct and indirect modifications caused by man. Habitats with a major component of native plants include shallow and deeper waters, wet pastures, and swamps.

### □ Shallow waters

Perhaps the most interesting plant communities are on temporarily exposed flats of the main lake and, on a much smaller scale, on seasonally dry beds of neighbouring ponds. For much of the year these flats are covered by shallow water whose depth is determined by rainfall, wind,



***Pratia perpusilla***: a member of the lobelia family, occurring locally from about Rotorua southwards; in beds of summer-dry ponds at L. Wairarapa. The plants shown produced wrinkled, hairy leaves on the driest mud, but reverted to green, almost hairless plants in cultivation.