



A diver's view of the sun shining through native spike rush (*Eleocharis sphacelata*). Photo taken on the fringe of Lake Ngatu, Northland.
Photo: Chris Tanner

Ousted from the depths native underwater plants

by Chris Tanner* and Lucy Harper†

Tall reeds fringed Lake Ngatu, the Northland dune lake where we started our scuba survey of underwater vegetation. Peering down through two metres of clear water, we could see the delicate and filmy, but carnivorous bladderwort floating around at the bases of the reeds. Below the surface the scene was even more captivating.

The sun shone through as we dived over the top of brilliant green meadows of native characean algae. Occasional bright orange fruiting bodies or a spiky pine tree-like form quickly identified the two major species in the rich carpet of plants. Smaller, less common plants nestled against the shoreline.

What a contrast to the murky waters and dense dark weed beds of exotics we have floundered through in many of our North Island lake surveys!

We later met to compare notes, talk of our finds and commiserate with each other that so few New Zealanders see this small but distinctive section of our flora; and that the opportunity for them to do so is rapidly disappearing.

Exotics are invading and taking over more and more of our freshwater habitats — yet there is no legal protection for native water vegetation. Northland has possibly the only examples of lakes where the vegetation is totally native.

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