



Hardy alpine plants cling tenaciously to the shattered rock ridges. Vegetable sheep (*Raoulia eximia*), native broom (*Carmichaelia monroi*) and *Dracophyllum uniflorum*.

Photo: Anne Relling

## THE TORLESSE RANGE

### *A Tussockland Conservation Park*

by Forest and Bird South Island field officer Mike Harding

*With the hot summer sun baking behind, you run with giant strides down a 30 degree slope, each step sinking deep into shattered rock fragments, the dust swirling around your boots. Below, the broad plains are stretched out like a carpet and sedentary sheep watch silently from the rock outcrops to the side. And, as you come to a sliding stop and the dust settles, flashes of colour show amongst the angular stones, bright flowers of the unusual plants that share this slope with lizards, butterflies and wetas. The top of the steep slope is framed hundreds of metres above by teetering rock ridges. From a dark speck spiralling against the sky, the sharp cry of the kea is heard. Far below a small stream winds its way between terraces of golden tussock and the jumbled boulders at the base of the slope. This is Canterbury. Not the peopled patchwork of the plains, or the wild snowy mountains of the main divide, but the dry foothills range that separates the two – a mountain wilderness at Canterbury's doorstep.*



The light green and red of the scree willowherb (*Epilobium pycnostachyum*) brightens the grey scree slope. Photo: Mike Harding