

Rarer than the kakapo

THE MARLBOROUGH chalk cress (*Cheesemania* sp.), a plant believed to have been extinct for the last 15 years, has been rediscovered. In a search earlier this year, staff from the Department of Conservation found 45 chalk cress clinging to steep bluffs on private land in the Chalk Range in eastern Marlborough.

Previous searches to the north and south by Forest and Bird and DoC staff over the past three years had failed to locate the cress.

The Chalk Range and sites in the nearby Isolated Hill Scenic Reserve were the only known locations of the cress which was first discovered by DSIR scientists in 1953.

There are seven known species of *Cheesemania*. One is restricted to Tasmania while the rest are endemic to the South Island. This particular species is unusual in appearance with leaves that come back to a single point on a large root which extends from the



SHANNEL COURTNEY

Looking a bit like a miniature palm tree, the chalk cress grows up to 10 cm high before flowering and up to 25 cm while in flower.

ground. The plant is highly palatable, and introduced browsing animals such as goats, possums, sheep and hares were thought to have eaten the plant to extinction by the 1970s.

Ecologist Shannel Courtney of Nelson, whose hunch that the cress was still surviving led to the search, said plants such as the chalk cress were an important part of New Zealand's distinctive natural character.

"Plants are often overlooked in our efforts to save endangered species because they don't engender the same human empathy as rare animals," he said.

DoC staff have since returned to the range to collect seed from flowering plants. These have been successfully propagated in an effort to ensure the survival of the species. DoC will also look at ways in which the habitat of the plant can be protected. The plant is even rarer than the kakapo and is critically endangered.

A walk on the wet side

UNDER the boardwalk in the heart of Tauranga city is a protected wetland which has recently become accessible to the city's residents.

Snaking along the edges of the Waikareao estuary, the 2.8-km boardwalk was completed in April. It joins up with a conventional walking track along the harbour foreshore. The idea to take the walk beyond dry land, across valuable saltmarsh and mangrove wetlands – habitat for birds and marine life – was an ambitious one. And the means of its construction were imaginative too.

Tauranga District access training manager Don Stewart said the boardwalk was constructed by young job experience workers employed under Taskforce Green. "Protection of the fragile wetland environment had to be considered at all times," he said. "It is a credit to those involved in the



BAY OF PLENTY TIMES

Taskforce Green workers in the early stages of building the boardwalk.

construction that only minimal disturbance was created to the area's natural ecology."

Access to the construction sites was not always easy and at

one stage a helicopter was used to bring timber to the workers.

The project has been the result of co-operation between the local Maori people from

the Hurea marae, a number of government departments and the Tauranga District Council.

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