Wildflowers of the Manawatu and Whanganui Regions

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This book is dedicated to my dear wife of 60 years, Gillian Bennett, a former teacher of Botany at Napier Girls' High School, a keen dog walker and lover of nature. At the moment of writing, she has late stage Alzheimer's and is being cared for at Alden Aroha Rest Home in Palmerston North. She accompanied me on the many walks where I found and photographed most of the flowers in this book.

I would like to acknowledge my son, Michael Bennett,
who contributed some of the better photographs.

INTRODUCTION

The cover of this book shows the beautiful Manawatu River that flows past Palmerston North. Nearly all of the photos in this book were taken on various dog-walks in parks and reserves around Palmerston North mostly on the banks of this river. A handful were taken a little further away in spots such as the Reserve at Ashurst, the Domain at Bulls or the beach at Foxton. There are also a handful from the roadside between Palmerston and Whanganui and places in-between. All the photographs were taken by the author except a few that were taken by the author's son, Michael Bennett, and a few acknowledged images from the web. Feel free to use any of these photos as you wish to help promote a love for and an interest in wildflowers.

Part of my purpose in producing this book was to try and change the general attitude of the public towards our introduced flora. I love our native bush and would not wish it to be threatened by introduced species. When I was younger, I was keen on tramping in our bush and occasionally mountains. The recently deceased Shaun Barnett, a noted promoter of tramping in the New Zealand bush, acknowledged that I was the person who introduced him to the activity when he was a student at Taradale High School. Now, my age and level of fitness deny me that pleasure, and with millions of other New Zealanders our nature loving activities must be confined to the more easily accessible parts of our country. We should face the fact that a

large portion of New Zealand is not native bush. It is either pastoral or arable farmland or else it is urban. You will find very few native plants that can tolerate these habitats. They have become the home of introduced species. The traditional farmer's view was that every plant that was not rye grass or clover was a weed and had to be eradicated by all possible means. On arable cropping land that is still a reasonable policy. On grazing country that is not necessarily the case. The health and palatability of our livestock might actually be improved if their diet consisted of a much wider range of species than rye grass and clover. But even farmland is not all fields. It is hedges and ditches, field margins, stream sides, yards, farm gates, verges and roadsides. Together with our urban parks, reserves and walkways, all this is a neglected estate, the domain of our interesting and often beautiful wildflowers. I believe that it is high time we acknowledged that our alien plants are here to stay. The first step is to stop calling them weeds but instead regard them as our wildflowers and part of not just our colonial heritage but our common New Zealand heritage.

Let's talk about their names. There are three types of names, the Te Reo common name, the English common name, and the Latin botanical name, and the greatest of the three has to be the Latin botanical name. This is the name by which the same plant will be recognized as by any botanist in any country of the world. The plant we call the Dandelion (**Taraxacum officinale**) has dozens of common names in different parts of Europe such as Caisearbhán, Löwenzahn, Gyermekláncfű, or Luleradhiqe. I would only recognize the German name. Every botanist though will recognize **Taraxacum officinale**. What is worse, the same plant can have many common names in the same country. For instance, in Te Reo in various parts of the country, **Sonchus oleraceus** has been called *Pūhā, Pūhāhā, Raurōroa, Rewha,* or *Pūwhā*. All the introduced wildflowers will certainly have a Latin name, and most have already at least one common English name. They will not generally have a Te Reo common name. The acquisition of Te Reo names for introduced species will happen as a matter of course over decades if not centuries. It will happen by borrowing, transliteration or invention. As the Māori have been acquainted with many of the introduced wildflowers for at least two hundred years, by now, many of these plants will have already acquired a Te Reo common name. Very few

native species have gained a footing in our rural and urban environments, so it is only occasionally that the species I will be dealing with lacks an English common name. This is a bit of a problem. Sometimes we can borrow the Te Reo name which has already acquired meaning in its English usage. An example would be the Kowhai. Sometimes however, the Te Reo name would struggle to acquire meaning in English. One example is the *Pohuehue* (**Muehlenbeckia australis**). How many English speakers would understand *Pohuehue*? I personally think it is absurd to call it Muehlenbeckia in English. My only contribution to New Zealand flora is therefore to hereby christen it Scrambling Jenny. To avoid *Pohuehue* is not out of disrespect to Māori. Each language has its own rules. Early Māori could not borrow "Vetch" as a word because it contains two sounds not used in Te Reo and did not follow the syllabic pattern of Te Reo words. Similarly, *Pohuehue* has an alien feel in English and does not contain any meaningful word elements. Anyone can invent a common name. Nobody can ensure that it gets used! Some species have a fairly well recognized Te Reo name and an English common name as well, such as *Poroporo*, the Potato Berry (**Solanum laciniatum**). The Latin name is assured but only time will tell which common name will endure. I'm betting on *Poroporo*.

I am fully aware that my philosophy of loving our wildflowers will sometimes be in conflict with the views of The Horizons District Council and their Pest Management objectives. I too, actually, think it is undesirable that any introduced species should invade the New Zealand native vegetation environments to the detriment of native plants. Thus, I am in fact in favour for example, of the eradication wherever possible of Wandering Willy, Ivy and Asparagus fern.

I am also aware that many farmers have been generationally indoctrinated to regard any plant other than grass or clover as a weed to be eradicated by any means possible. I hope I can modify that view just a tad, after all, their wives planted Agapanthus by the farm gate.

Before New Zealand was discovered and colonized by Europeans, our country consisted of several floral habitats. There was some tussock grassland, some coastal dunes, but primarily there were two major floral habitats – the temperate rain forest which we refer to as the bush, and the mountainous areas above the tree-line. The bush was

they find the conditions right, and sometimes they find them bloody perfect. This might be great for the Milk Thistle in Hawkes Bay, the Kiwi fruit in the Bay of Plenty, or the Gorse in Wainuiomata, but it is far from great for humans who have to deal with these rampaging invasive species. Even I, with my love of wildflowers, am sorely tempted to regard some of them as nasty, noxious weeds. Why do some flowers become a problem? The main cause is that we introduced the plants but forgot to introduce the particular insects that ate them.

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WILD RADISH (**Raphanus raphanistrum**)

On your walks in springtime by the Mangaone Stream, you will see enormous stands of the Wild Radish that you could easily get lost in. There is however a cycle in the vegetation. A month or so later and the Wild Radish will have flowered and set seed and died away. The soil will crack open, and a giant species of Helianthus will start to emerge from its underground tubers. By the end of summer, it will completely dominate where the Wild Radish once flourished.

TWIGGY TURNIP (**Brassica fruticulosa**)

Instead of in thousands, this related species (possibly the Twiggy Turnip, grows in a perennial clump of a dozen or so plants.




The **Brassicaceae** were formerly called the **Cruciferae** because that relates to the crux, the cross shaped arrangements of the petals. Here are some more examples of the Wild Radish, demonstrating the wide range of colours it comes in. As you can see below, it sports a palette of many shades, but never buttercup yellow.

TURNIP WEED (**Rapistrum rugosum**)

Most Brassicas fall into one of two groups, the yellow-flowered mustards, and the white-flowered cresses.