

OUR NATIVE TREES: TWO COMPREHENSIVE VOLUMES

Reviewed by Les Molloy

New Zealand's Native Trees, John Dawson & Rob Lucas (with Jane Connor), 2011, Craig Potton Publishing, 576pp. Rrp: \$120 (Deluxe limited edition, \$180).

Wardle's Native Trees of New Zealand and their story, John Wardle (with principal photographer Ian Platt), 2011, NZ Farm Forestry Association with Bateson Publishing Ltd, 398pp. Rrp: \$95.

It is now more than 30 years since Reeds published the first large format full colour book of our native trees – J.T.Salmon's "The Native Trees of New Zealand". Salmon's 384-page volume set a high standard in production values for its day but scientific advances over the intervening decades, particularly taxonomic revisions through DNA sequencing, have meant that an up-to-date, informative, illustrated reference book on such an important part of our natural heritage is long overdue. However, two major large-format comprehensive volumes (each with an

alleged gestation of 6-7 years) in the space of a couple of months is a double blessing.

Deciding just what constitutes a 'tree' and how much coverage should be given to subspecies and varieties has meant that Wardle describes 232 native species but Dawson/Lucas cover nearly 100 more taxa (320 in all). Both authors have made an effort to describe their subject matter in an easy to read but authoritative text, with a minimum of ecological and botanical jargon. But the organization of our spectrum



of native trees in a way that enables the reader to easily find any particular tree is quite a challenge. Although each book uses the broad grouping of conifers, tree ferns and flowering trees, Dawson and Lucas list the species in alphabetical order of the scientific name of their genus, whereas Wardle adopts more of a family/common name grouping. Dawson/Lucas provides more botanical detail (especially through the captions of myriad photos of leaves, flowers and seeds). Wardle, however, devotes much more attention to the utility of the trees, especially their silviculture, horticulture and shelter values, timber qualities, and historical uses (including medicinal values) – as befits the likely readership of a publication promoted by the NZ Farm Forestry Association.

The experience of the highly effective team of author John Dawson, photographer Rob Lucas, and publisher Jane Connor is very evident in the crafting of the Potton publication. The outstanding feature is Rob Lucas's 2300 superb photographs, excelling even his earlier work in *The Native Garden: design themes from wild New Zealand* and *Nature Guide to the New Zealand Forest*. In addition, Potton's reputation for

design excellence is carried through with Tina Delceg's and Jane Connor's design and layout. I particularly liked the more than 50 interesting boxes, detailing all manner of native tree phenomena from cauliflory to mistletoes, to the cabbage tree moth.

Both books deserve a place on the shelf of any lover of our native trees, for they are to an extent complementary. However, the far superior photographic coverage in the Dawson/Lucas volume will probably be the deciding factor for those who have to make a choice. For instance, Wardle describes 7 tree species of *Hebe* but with only 4 photos; on the other hand, Dawson/Lucas cover 9 species (using the revised nomenclature *Veronica*) with a total of 72 photos. Again, Wardle has only 11 photos for 14 tree species of *Pittosporum*, while Dawson/Lucas extend to 114 photos of 15 species. Finally, the only minor disappointing feature about both books is the lack of any 'thumbnail' sketch maps of the geographical distribution of each tree species (although the information is generally there somewhere in the text).