

During my observation, the birds ignored the coprosma fruit, preferring those of horopito.

The mature berries of *P. axillaris* are insipid. However when unripe, the fruits have a distinct camphor-like taste. Camphor and related defence compounds are common in the Australian flora, where in unripe fruits they serve to prevent premature consumption. Perhaps this camphor-like property in the young fruits of *P. axillaris* similarly ensures against premature feeding by meliphagids, a primarily Australian group.

Pseudowintera is the New Zealand member of the Winteraceae, generally considered the most primitive extant flowering plant family. Little is known of the modes of seed dispersal in this ancient group and further reports will contribute significantly to the study of plant-animal co-evolution.

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DESTRUCTION OF BLUE DUCK HABITAT

A classic example of how favourable habitat can be quickly eliminated occurred in Otago during the major flood of 2 December 1979. Torrential rain fell along the Main Divide, with peaks at certain localities (Mt Cook reported 21 in. = 533 mm in less than 24 hours). Evidently a similar concentration occurred in the catchment of the Young River (near Makarora, head of Lake Wanaka). The south-branch riverbed and enclosing walls were completely scoured out from above subalpine scrubline to the confluence with the Makarora (in altitude from 3200' to 1000' — 975 m to 305 m).

Beech trees, logs, limbs, silt and other debris were strewn throughout the valley, including in places several metres inside the forest margins where no such flooding has occurred for more than a century. This flood was even more disastrous in this region than that of October 1978.

The river boulders were completely abraded of growth — gone are all traces of the mosses and algae which harboured caddis larvae and other sub-aquatic invertebrate foods of the Blue Duck (*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchus*). The river looks raw and sterile. No ducks could be found on 7 January 1980 where formerly there had been at least three in the upper reaches. This is a serious loss in view of the scarcity of Blue Ducks in Mount Aspiring National Park.

It will be of some interest to see how long it takes for the river to return to suitable feeding condition and whether any Blue Ducks then return to it.

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