

Elytranthe in the vicinity of Nelson Lakes National Park

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The history of *Elytranthe* species in a small area of the Nelson province can be documented from records made from as early as 1844. J. C. Bidwill wrote to Sir William Hooker from Sydney on November 6, 1844, after a visit to Nelson: ". . . I found most of these beech trees covered by several species of *Loranthus* which were not in flower. I was very surprised to find young plants of these *Loranthi* on seedling beeches *not six inches high*". And again from Sydney on May 11, 1848, on his return from New Zealand when he sent to Sir William plants and specimens "collected by me in March last in New Zealand chiefly near Nelson or between that place and the head of the Wairau Valley called the Wairau Pass." These specimens included "No. 22. [*Elytranthe colensoi*] On the different species of *Fagus* (?only). Flowers bright scarlet, very numerous, beautiful. If, as I think, this plant only grows on the beeches it must be different from *L. tetrapetala* of Forst . . . On the margins of the beech forest may be seen thousands of young plants of this species growing on young trees not a foot high." and "No. 23 [?E. tetrapetala] On *Fagus* (No. 29) on Cypress Mountain*, Wairau Pass, at an elevation of 4000ft, flowering in March. Perhaps not uncommon elsewhere. Flowers very large (see specimen in bottle) splendid crimson colour. If I lived in New Zealand I would not be long before I managed to send some of these beautiful and probably hardy plants to England. You may find them growing on beeches not six inches high and in the greatest abundance, while the *Loranthi* of New South Wales are only found on the large trees and wither so immediately on being gathered that I could never succeed in budding or inarching them. I did apparently succeed in budding one of these when I was last in New Zealand, on an *Acacia longifolia* in a garden, but it had not actually sprouted when I left."

Mrs Charles Hetley (1888) illustrated *Loranthus* [*Elytranthe*] *colensoi* from L. Rotoiti and wrote: ". . . This is a most beautiful plant, growing principally in the forests near Nelson, in spring when it blooms. The Beech or *Fagus* woods are red with it, it hangs on large branches from the trees and covers the ground with the flowers which have dropped . . . On Lake Station and on the banks of lovely L. Rotoiti it is very abundant. The shape of the flower is very peculiar and differs very much from *Loranthus adamsii*—Fls in January."

* "a mountain on the right hand side of the pass leading from the Motupeka Valley into the Wairau Pass" (p. 1a of letter).

Some sixty-five years later Mrs K. Wood (1954) was able to report: 'At Lakes Rotoiti and Rotorua where Beech, *Nothofagus menziesii*, *N. solandri*, and *N. fusca* were predominant, great masses of scarlet mistletoe (*Elytranthe colensoi*) provided bright patches of colour and the yellow *E. flavida* was also seen.'

In the early 1960's when the text for a nature talk walk at Lake Rotoiti (published 1965) was being prepared it was possible for me to say "The colourful mistletoes *Elytranthe tetrapetala* and *E. flavida* can cover the ground with fallen red and yellow blossoms . . ." [*E. colensoi* should have been included as all three were recorded for the area]. But writing only a year or two later for the Nelson Lakes National Park handbook (1965), I said . . . "a few years ago the very colourful mistletoes with red and yellow flowers were a notable feature of the forest, but they have not been so conspicuous in the last year or so." By 1971, when a careful search was made for plants of mistletoe in the vicinity of St Arnaud and Lake Rotoiti to assist Dr B. P. J. Molloy in his current investigations of the genus, less than half a dozen plants were located. In that year some splendid clumps of *E. colensoi* flowered on isolated silver beech trees on either side of the road just north of the bridge over the Rappahannock River. By the following year they were dead: the bare branches can still be seen.

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