



the narrow-leaved MAIRE



A CONSERVATION PROJECT

The narrow-leaved maire (*Nestegis montana*) is very rare in the South Island.

The Department of Conservation has recorded a small number growing near Kaikoura, there is an unsubstantiated report of the trees occurring in the Pelorus Valley near Havelock and five only remain at Waimea West near Nelson.

The narrow-leaved maire was once more common around Waimea West. Early settlers spoke of its value for firewood and fence posts and this together with the wholesale clearance of the land for farming led to its decline. In 2001, however, the owners of the largest tree, Tony and Barbara Cameron, alerted Lawrie Metcalfe, a well-known horticulturist and author, to the heavy flowering that was taking place. The tree was identified as a male so it then became critical to find a female if pollination was to take place.

Two other trees in a nearby protected bush remnant also proved to be males but as luck would have it the only other known tree (one more has since been discovered) growing on a scarp one kilometre away was not only a female but also in full flower.

This presented both an opportunity and a challenge because there was no possibility of the pollen from the male tree blowing in the wind this far. At this stage nature was given a helping hand. Martin Conway, with the help of Lawrie Metcalfe, cut flowering branches from the male tree and tied them up high in the female tree in the hope that pollination would take place. This did in fact happen; the seed set, eventually ripened and was collected in a net that had been placed around the base of the tree.



Appletons QEII Covenant

Seed was sown in 2002 and although germination was slow the percentage was high and by 2005 several hundred seedlings were ready for planting out.

In late winter 2005, more than 200 trees were distributed, free of charge, to Department of Conservation, Tasman District Council, and private landowners for planting in reserves, QEII National Trust covenants and other sites, all within the Wai-iti Valley catchment.

The planting sites have since all been recorded on maps and the trees within reserves and covenants will be monitored at least every two years.

The narrow-leaved maire tree restoration project is an example of practical conservation. It is ironic that although three of the five trees have legal protection and this alone has not prevented their steady decline. Rare plants can survive (or better increase) only if their habitats are well managed and this almost always requires protection from farm animals, control of animal and plant pests, as well as replanting.

Martin Conway was until recently the local QEII representative, and has offered valuable advice in the management of the QEII covenant on our farm. Martin and his wife Jo have received a merit award for their advocacy for national habitat restoration and improved riparian management. Thanks to Martin for the use of his excellent slides.

