

Eagle's complete trees and shrubs of New Zealand

Book launch, Auckland War Memorial Museum, 21 November 2006

It is a great honour for me to be invited by Audrey and Te Papa Press to launch these truly magnificent books – Eagle's Complete Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand, Volumes 1 & 2 – weighing 6 kg, a tome of monumental proportions.

This is a very special occasion in the annals of New Zealand botany, and one unlikely to be repeated in the foreseeable future. Significantly, it coincides with the centenary celebration of Thomas Cheeseman's Manual of the New Zealand Flora published in 1906.

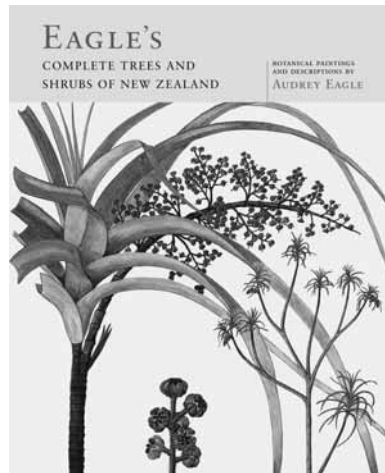
As a country we can be thankful for the wide range of books, both historic and recent, illustrating and describing many of the trees and shrubs of New Zealand. Each of these has a place on our bookshelf or in a reference library and may be consulted from time to time. Audrey's two volume collection stands apart from all of these for its comprehensive and meticulous treatment of our trees and shrubs, whether named or unnamed.

Her first book in 1975 consisted of 228 paintings of New Zealand trees and shrubs, including coverage of most of the genera recognized at that time; her second in 1982 complemented this with a further 405 paintings, including many undescribed plants, a feature of her work.

Now, in 2006, these paintings have been brought together with the addition of a further 173, giving a total of around 800 illustrations of species, subspecies, and unnamed plants; a remarkable lifetime achievement of a talented, dedicated, and tenacious person, totally devoted to our native plants. For me the accuracy, warmth, and human touch of Audrey's paintings are the enduring features of this collection. With few exceptions the main illustration of each plant is reproduced life size, thereby aiding in its identification. The flowers and fruit, often naturally small,

are enlarged where necessary to highlight their principal features and enhance recognition.

At a time when we are being overwhelmed by DNA sequences, cladograms, phylograms, and rooted trees of a different kind, it is a welcome relief to turn the pages of these books and see what real trees look like, and shrubs.



And talking about turning pages, I strongly recommend that all future owners of this collection buy a pair of soft white gloves and put them on whenever you open the books. That way you will retain your copy of this iconic collection of New Zealand botanical art and literature in near mint condition.



And to all would be owners of this collection, not only will you be investing in the life and work of the celebrated Audrey Eagle, but also in the contribution of numerous botanists, field naturalists, and others who have helped in its compilation. As you turn the pages, each of you will know where your imprint lies. I know of no other work where so many people have been willing contributors over so many

years, and been so generously acknowledged.

I am confident that these two books will be put to good use as a surrogate herbarium by people wishing to recognize and know more about our trees and shrubs, especially since threatened plants, biodiversity, and restoration are topics of considerable moment. And I fully expect these books to serve as a benchmark and be regularly cited in future botanical publications naming and describing our unnamed woody plants. To others still these books will form a treasured collection of botanical art to be savoured by their families, friends, and visitors.

Audrey, it has been a long journey for you, at times tearful and painful but mostly joyous, especially when presented with a new or difficult-to-find plant to paint. This evening must rank as the most satisfying in your eventful life. Sadly, many people who figured prominently in your early work are not here to share this celebration with you; in particular your late husband Harold, a stalwart supporter of your work, and the late Tony Druce, your botanical mentor and arguably our greatest field botanist. Tony above us all set you on this path and guided you from the beginning. It is

pleasing to see how a younger generation of botanists and others have stepped up to help you continue on your path.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure, on your behalf, to formally launch Eagle's Complete Trees and Shrubs of New Zealand, Volumes 1 & 2; to lavish praise on the author Audrey Eagle for her incredible achievement; to commend all the contributors, past and present, who helped in its compilation; and to

congratulate Te Papa Press for bringing this superb production to fruition.

Brian Molloy, Research Associate Landcare Research, Lincoln.

Audrey Eagle was awarded an Associate of Honour of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (AHRH) in 2002 (see the *New Zealand Garden Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1, June 2004, p.21).