

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Mr Shane Wisby, Eaglehawk Neck, for his specimen of *P. spinosum*, Dr George Cresswell, C.S.I.R.O., Hobart, for his information on sea conditions, Mr N.G. Bates, Barnes Bay, and Mr M.W. Wells, Bonnet Hill, for their reports of likely sightings of *P. spinosum*.

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HYPOLEPIS DISTANS — A NEW SPECIES RECORD FOR MAINLAND TASMANIA

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Until 1973 the ground fern *Hypolepis distans* was believed to be a New Zealand endemic. In 1973, Mr P.F. Barnett collected some specimens from King Island which were later identified by R.J. Chinnock as *Hypolepis distans*, (see Chinnock 1976) thus extending the known distribution of the species.

During the course of a survey of non-allocated Crown land around Smithton (Neyland 1988), I collected some material which was forwarded to R.J. Chinnock via the Hobart herbarium and which has been recently confirmed also as *Hypolepis distans*, extending the known distribution of the species to mainland Tasmania. The sample was collected from the eastern edge of the Fourteen Mile Plain, just off Barcoo Road, about 20km southwest of Smithton. (Hunter 1:100,000 Land Tenure Sheet, Grid Ref: 247705).

The Smithton sample was found on the base of a windthrown *Eucalyptus brookerana*, in an area of swamp forest comprising *E. brookerana* over a mixed understorey of blackwood, tea tree (*Leptospermum scoparium*) and scattered myrtle and sassafras. The ground layer was dominated by cutting grass and sags (*Lepidosperma elatius*) and at a later visit in winter the area was partly flooded to a depth of 10cm. The area is therefore similar to that described for the King Island location *Melaleuca squarrosa* - *Leptospermum scoparium* Swamp, Chinnock 1976) and both records accord well with the New Zealand ecology of the species, where it is found in "swampy areas, on peat, in soils with a deep humus

layer, or on decomposing logs" (Brownsey and Chinnock 1984).

The other Tasmanian species of *Hypolepis*; *H. rugosula*, *H. muelleri* and *H. amaurorhachis* are difficult to separate with confidence, however, *H. distans* is quite distinct. The thin (0.7-1mm diameter) stipe which is red-brown in colour (characters from Brownsey and Chinnock 1987) is the most distinguishing feature, as the other three species have thicker (1-5mm diameter) stipes which range from yellow-brown to green at the apices, though they grade to red-brown at their base. Other notable features include the pendulous arrangement of the frond (as the stipe is too thin to support its own weight), the narrowness of the frond, and the veins ending in indentations instead of points.

Whilst swamp forests are not the most attractive places to spend a Sunday afternoon, if you do happen to be wandering around in one keep your eyes open for this rare and distinctive species. The Department of Lands, Parks and Wildlife and the Forestry Commission are currently jointly compiling an atlas of the ferns of Tasmania, and field naturalists throughout the State are invited to contribute. Records are collected using the 10k grid on the Tasmap 1:100,000 (or 1:25,000) sheets. For example, the Hobart G.P.O. is in grid square 52/25 (easting then northing). If in any doubt about an identification, please forward a piece of pressed and dried fertile material with your records for checking. Please forward any records to the author, care of Lands, Parks and Wildlife, G.P.O. Box 44A, Hobart.

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