

## A FERN OUT OF PLACE

Mark Wapstra

*Environmental Consulting Options Tasmania, 28 Suncrest Avenue, Lenah Valley, Tasmania 7008; email: mark@ecotas.com.au*

The native fern growing lushly in a drain in the heart of Hobart caught me by surprise. In a concrete box drain in the alleyway (I think the lower section is called Mathers Lane) between Liverpool Street and Bathurst Street, near the rear entrance of the State Library, is a small population of *Microsorium pustulatum* clinging tenaciously to its civic existence.

*Microsorium pustulatum* (or to those who follow the confused world of botanical taxonomy and nomenclature it has been known as *Microsorium diversifolium* and *Phymatosorus pustulatum*, or combinations thereof) is usually an epiphyte or lithophyte, growing most commonly on the trunks of rainforest and wet forest trees (such as blackwoods and myrtles) or on rock faces in many forest situations. The species has a very wide ecological tolerance growing from near sea-level in the salt spray zone to at least 850 m elevation on exposed mountain summits, occupying a wide range of vegetation types from rainforest, scrub, wet sclerophyll and dry sclerophyll forest (Garrett 1996).

The species' penchant for less than native situations is highlighted in Garrett (1996), who reports on occurrences of the species as an epiphyte on introduced willows and as a "lithophyte" on the stone facade of buildings in Zeehan. The present observations add to the list of unusual habitats occupied by this native fern.

I note that in my last stroll past this drain in October 2007 that the fern is being overcome by the introduced *Cymbalaria muralis* (ivyleaf toadflax: Scrophulariaceae), and I wonder which will be the most tenacious species.

After making the city centre observation described above, I noted a clump of *M. pustulatum* growing on the brick wall of a building in central Mount Stuart. The building is circa 1970 (currently used as a dance school and community hall) but whether the plant is an ornamental or a natural lithophyte is unknown to me.

### REFERENCES

Garrett, M. (1996). *The Ferns of Tasmania: Their Ecology and Distribution*. Tasmanian Forest Research Council, Inc., Hobart.