

4. Northern rata and mistletoe

Northern rata is usually an epiphyte that begins life high in an old tree, where the seedling sends aerial roots earthwards. Side roots grow around the host trunk and when the downward growing roots find the ground they thicken and surround the host. Eventually the host dies and rots until all that remains is the hollow trunk of the rata supporting a mass of branches above the canopy. The rata becomes host to a vast mass of epiphytes.



Northern rata

Photo: Les Molloy. Inset: Jason Christensen.



Red mistletoe—not seen here for many years

Photo: John Smith-Dodsworth.

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Look out for plants that live on the large forest trees. Some are epiphytes (they use the plant they live on to get closer to the light) others are parasites (they take food and/or water and minerals from their host plant).

Read the interpretation panels 'Northern Rata – At Risk from Possums' and 'Epiphytes' on the Orongorongo Track.

Possums are not a pest to the forests in Australia.



- Look out for rata that grow on the Orongorongo track. You may also notice dead skeletons of rata—caused by possums. Sketch any that you see.

Describe the stage they are at in their life cycle (using the photos to help you). Is the rata being supported by another tree or is it the rata's turn to play host?

Mistletoes are parasitic plants living in other trees. They do produce their own green leaves and so do not depend on their host for food, but as they have no roots in the ground the host provides all their water and minerals. Mistletoes have not been seen in this area for several years.

- Look on the forest floor for any parasitic plants that live on the rotting logs. Sketch one.

Rata and host trees of mistletoe are sometimes protected from possums by fixing a wide metal band to the trunk and clearing the branches of other trees that reach over into them.

- There are many ways to get rid of possums but some of them kill other animals as well. For each of the possum control methods listed below, list other animals that might be affected: baited Timms traps, cyanide poison attached to branches, baited cage traps, aerial drops of 1080 poison.