# Genetic diversity of Dactylantbus taylorii in New Zealand 

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#### Abstract

Randomly amplified polymorphic DNA (RAPD) markers were used to investigate genetic variation amongst 17 populations ( 146 individuals) of the endangered parasitic plant Dactylanthus taylorii. The objective was to provide a means of identifying a set of populations that are representative of the full range of genetic diversity within the species, towards which conservation resources might be targeted. RAPDs produced clear, reproducible bands, and 84 polymorphic marker bands were identified. Analysis of the RAPD data, based on Nei's genetic distance, produced a dendrogram that grouped all individuals (bar one) into their expected populations. A similar analysis at the population level showed the grouping of populations was, to a significant extent, determined by geographical distribution. Two major clusters were evident, one containing populations close to and east of Lake Taupo, and the second consisting mainly of populations west of Lake Taupo. Little Barrier Island, the most isolated population, occupied a discrete branch within the second cluster. Further geographical ordering was evident within the major clusters, with neighbouring populations being grouped together. The populations at Little Barrier Island, Pirongia, Mamaku, and Waitaanga Forest were identified as being the most genetically distinct at the national level, and it is recommended that these are targeted for management. Overall, genetic groupings did not reflect conservancy boundaries. For this reason it is also recommended that conservancy management decisions regarding the allocation of resources to populations, or withdrawal thereof, should take into account the genetic status of those populations at the national level.


## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 B A C K G R O U N D

Dactylanthus taylorii Hook. f. (Balanophoraceae) is an endemic, fully parasitic plant, and an ancient member of the New Zealand flora. The plant consists of a round, warty tuber of up to 50 cm diameter which attaches as a parasite to the root of a host tree or shrub (Ecroyd 1996). The tuber exists predominantly underground, with usually only the inflorescences of the plant exposed at the surface.

Isolated, often small (<20 tubers) populations of D. taylorii are scattered over a large area of the North Island. These populations are threatened, primarily, by the browsing of inflorescences by possums and rats (Ecroyd 1996). Dactylanthus taylorii is classified as an endangered species of national importance (Molloy \& Davis 1994) and all North Island Department of Conservation (DOC) Conservancies (Northland and Wellington excepted) are
involved in managing populations. Management consists of both the caging of individual tubers and the use of poisoning, to prevent browsing (Ecroyd 1995).

A principal aim in the conservation of any endangered species is to preserve as much of its genetic diversity as possible. Where populations are widespread and scattered, as is the case for $D$. taylorii, the most financially and logistically realistic means of doing this is to concentrate efforts upon key populations that represent a maximum proportion of the species' genetic diversity (Maxted et al. 1997; Petit et al. 1998). However, in the absence of information on the genetic distinctness of $D$. taylorii populations, management efforts are currently spread over all populations. Significant resources have been committed to these efforts, especially in conservancies managing several small, scattered populations or a few, very large ones (Anon. 1995; Anon 1996).

The primary objective of this study was to obtain information about genetic variation amongst populations of $D$. taylorii, so that DOC resources, at both the conservancy and national level, might be targeted towards populations which best represent the overall genetic diversity of the species.

### 1.2 RANDOMLY AMPLIFIED POLYMORPHIC DNA MARKERS

Holzapfel (in press) carried out a preliminary investigation of genetic variation in D. taylorii, using randomly amplified polymorphic DNA markers (RAPDs). Based upon the success of that work, the current study also utilised RAPDs.

RAPDs form a DNA marker technique (Williams et al. 1990) which utilises the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). PCR allows the amplification of specific DNA sequences within a genome. Using this methodology, short DNA molecules (primers) are placed in a reaction mix with genomic DNA, and bind to sequence(s) within that DNA which are complementary to their own. If the two primer molecules bind within a distance of 2 kilobase pairs of one another, then the intervening sequence will be amplified (Hoelzel \& Green 1998).

RAPDs utilise only a single primer per reaction. Because the primer is not designed to recognise one specific sequence, it may bind at multiple, unknown positions within the genome. Therefore RAPDs usually produce a number of DNA fragments of varying sizes, from each DNA sample being compared. The fragments are separated according to size on an agarose gel and then stained, resulting in a characteristic banding pattern for each individual sample. Bands which vary in terms of presence or absence across all samples (polymorphic bands) are identified as markers. The similarity of samples is then computed from the presence or absence of each marker in each sample.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1 PLANT MATERIAL

Inflorescences were collected as buds, prior to or at the beginning of flowering, from populations at 17 North Island localities (Table 1, Figure 1) during 1998. The exception to this was the Mamaku population, for which samples collected in 1996 were used. Note that Tarawera Plot includes only a single sample, and the Egmont National Park population comprised individuals from six subpopulations. A peduncle section immediately below the inflorescence head was cleaned and excised as a block, then frozen in liquid nitrogen and stored at $-80^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$ until DNA extraction could be performed. A reference collection of all samples is held by A.S. Holzapfel (DOC, Waikato Conservancy).

TABLE 1. LOCATION OF Dactylanthus taylorii POPULATIONS AND NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SAMPLED FOR GENETIC ANALYSIS.

|  |  |  |
| :--- | :--- | ---: |
| LOCALITY | CONSERVANCY | NO. SAMPLED |
| Little Barrier Island | Auckland | 10 |
| Pirongia | Waikato | 10 |
| Pureora | Waikato | 10 |
| Paeroa Range | Bay of Plenty | 10 |
| Minginui | Bay of Plenty | 10 |
| Mamaku | Bay of Plenty | 9 |
| Opepe | Tongariro/Taupo | 8 |
| Whakaipo | Tongariro/Taupo | 10 |
| South Pihanga | Tongariro/Taupo | 6 |
| Ohakune | Tongariro/Taupo | 4 |
| Tarawera Plot | East Coast/Hawke's Bay | 1 |
| Te Araroa | East Coast/Hawke's Bay | 10 |
| Waikaremoana | East Coast/Hawke's Bay | 10 |
| Hawke's Bay | East Coast/Hawke's Bay | 9 |
| Waitanga Forest | Wanganui | 3 |
| Egmont National Park | Wanganui | 19 |
| Mangaweka | Wanganui | 7 |
| Total |  | 146 |



Figure 1. Map of the North Island of New Zealand, showing the location of the Dactylanthus taylorii populations used in the study and Conservancy boundaries (NOR Northland, AK Auckland, WAI Waikato, BP Bay of Plenty, EC/HB East Coast/Hawke's Bay, T/T Tongariro/Taupo, WNG Wanganui, WGT Wellington)

### 2.2 DNA EXTRACTION AND POLYMERASE CHAIN REACTION

DNA was extracted from c. 0.1 g of frozen tissue, using the CTAB method of Doyle \& Doyle (1990), with some modifications (Appendix I). DNA quantity and quality were assessed using a spectrophotometer (Genequant, Pharmacia, USA).

DNA from all 146 individuals was amplified by PCR, using each of five different synthetic oligonucleotide primers (Operon Technologies, Inc., USA):

```
Primer Sequence
OP-P02 5'-TCGGCACGCA-3'
OP-P10 5'-TCCCGCCTAC-3'
OP-P11 5'-AACGCGTCGG-3'
OP-P16 5'-CCAAGCTGCC-3'
OP-A20 5'-GTTGCGATCC-3'
```

PCR conditions are given in Appendix 1. Reproducibility between PCR runs was assessed by including a positive control sample with each set of reactions, and also by repeating PCR for selected individuals at a later date, for each primer used.

RAPD products were separated on a $1.5 \%$ Tris-borate-EDTA (TBE) agarose gel, and stained with ethidium bromide. For each primer, polymorphic bands were identified across all samples. Each individual was then scored for the presence or absence of each band, with $1=$ present, $0=$ absent and $?=$ missing data .

### 2.3 ANALYSIS OF GENETIC VARIABILITY

Using the population genetics analysis freeware POPGENE v.1.31 (Yeh et al. 1997), a UPGMA cluster analysis was performed on the data, based on Nei's genetic distance (Nei 1972). The higher the value of the genetic distance between samples, the more genetically distinct they are. Dendrograms were produced showing the relationships between all individuals, as well as between each population. Separate analyses were also made for populations at the conservancy level.

## 3. Results

The RAPDs method used resulted in clear, reproducible bands. Using the five primers listed above, a total of 84 polymorphic bands were identified amongst the 17 populations:

OP-P02, 20; OP-P10, 14; OP-P11, 14; OP-P16, 15; OP-A20, 21.
A further seven bands were identified that were monomorphic, and these were excluded from analysis. Of the markers found, nine were specific to certain populations: two to Little Barrier Island, two to Pirongia, and one each to Whakaipo, South Pihanga, Pureora, Waitaanga Forest, and Ohakune. The remainder varied in their presence or absence amongst all populations.

Banding patterns were relatively uniform within populations and more variable between populations (Fig. 2). This was reflected in a UPGMA analysis at the level of the individuals. This grouped all individuals into their correct popu-


Figure 2. RAPD patterns of individuals from seven Dactylanthus taylorii populations, illustrating higher genetic variability between populations than within. Lanes 1-3 Little Barrier Island; lanes 4-6 Pirongia; lanes 7-9 Pureora; lanes 10-11 Waitaanga Forest; lanes 12-14 Egmont National Park; lanes 15-17 Opepe; lanes 18-20 Mamaku. The outside lanes contain 100 bp ladder (Life Technologies, USA).
lations (data not shown), with two exceptions. One Pureora sample, which had RAPD phenotypes that were unique amongst all sampled individuals, was placed on a branch outside of all other populations. It also lacked three marker bands that were otherwise monomorphic amongst the other samples (species markers). Based on the possibility that this DNA sample had been contaminated by an outside source of DNA, it was excluded from analysis at the population level. One Whakaipo individual was also grouped with individuals of the neighbouring Opepe population.

At the population level UPGMA analysis revealed groupings of populations that reflected to some extent their geographical distribution (Figs 1, 3). Two main clusters were evident. The first (uppermost in Fig. 3) consisted mainly of populations close to and/or east of Lake Taupo. The second major cluster mainly included populations located to the west of Lake Taupo, with the exception of Mamaku (Bay of Plenty). Within this cluster, Little Barrier Island, the most isolated population (Fig. 1), occupied a single, distinct branch, with the remaining populations clustering more closely. Within the major clusters, further geographical ordering was apparent. For example, neighbouring pairs of populations were often grouped together, e.g. Opepe and Whakaipo, Waikaremoana and Minginui, Hawke's Bay and Mangaweka. However, exceptions to this trend were also found, such as Pureora and Egmont NP, Paeroa Range and South Pihanga.

The population analysis showed that populations did not generally group naturally into conservancies on a genetic basis (Fig. 3) and UPGMA analyses of the populations within each conservancy corroborated this (Fig. 4). Populations that are both geographically close and within the same conservancy were closely grouped by the conservancy level analysis, but only the Opepe and Whakaipo populations fall into this category.


Figure 3. Dendrogram showing relationships between populations of Dactylanthus taylorii, based upon Nei's genetic distance (scale at bottom), produced by UPGMA cluster analysis. Conservancies are given in parentheses: T/T = Taupo/Tongariro, BP = Bay of Plenty, EC/HB = East Coast/Hawke's Bay, AK = Auckland, WAI = Waikato, and WNG = Wanganui.


Figure 4. Dendrogram showing relationships between populations of Dactylanthus taylorii within each conservancy, based upon Nei's genetic distance (scale at bottom). A. Waikato; B. Bay of Plenty; C. East Coast/Hawke's Bay; D. Taupo/ Tongariro; E. Wanganui. Note that the Auckland Conservancy contains only one population (Little Barrier Island), and is therefore not shown.

At the national level the Pureora and Pirongia populations occurred in different major clusters (Fig. 3), therefore within the Waikato Conservancy they are notably genetically distinct (Fig. 4A). Although the populations in the Bay of Plenty Conservancy (except Mamaku) occupied the same major cluster at national level, they were more similar to populations from other conservancies than each other (Fig. 3). Therefore, at the conservancy level these populations are genetically diverse (Fig. 4B). Similarly, genetic diversity amongst the widelyscattered populations of the East Coast/Hawke's Bay Conservancy is high (Fig. 4C). Although all four populations were within the same large cluster at national level, they were more closely associated with populations from other conservancies (Fig. 3). In the Taupo/Tongariro Conservancy the northern Lake Taupo populations, Opepe and Whakaipo, are genetically similar and both are also genetically close to the southern Lake Taupo population, South Pihanga (Fig. 4D). However, Ohakune occupied a different major cluster at national level and is significantly distinct from the other populations in this Conservancy. There is genetic dissimilarity amongst the populations of the Wanganui Conservancy (Fig. 4E). At national level, Mangaweka population occupied a different major cluster to Egmont National Park and Waitaanga Forest (Fig. 3) and the latter two are more closely associated with populations from other Conservancies. The Auckland Conservancy contains only the Little Barrier Island population.

## 4. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate genetic variation amongst populations of $D$. taylorii, with the aim that populations that are genetically representative of the species as a whole might be identified. The RAPDs technique proved to be a successful means of achieving this, providing a set of 84 genetic markers from which a logical representation of the genetic similarity (measured as genetic distance) between populations was obtained. The information provided, primarily that in Fig. 3, is intended as a guide on which decisions regarding the targeting of certain key populations for management can be based.

We have shown that genetic similarity amongst populations of D. taylorii is influenced by their geographical distribution. Populations that are spatially close tend to be genetically similar whilst the more isolated populations are relatively distinct. The most genetically distinct populations identified at the national level are Little Barrier Island, the most isolated of the populations investigated, along with Pirongia, Mamaku, and Waitaanga Forest. As such, it is essential that these populations are amongst those targeted in any streamlined conservation strategy. The Tarawera Plot population was relatively dissimilar to others in its cluster, but it was represented only by a single plant and therefore its placement cannot be treated with certainty. The remaining populations grouped more closely in clusters of two or more, based largely upon their geographical association, and it is conceivable that, within these tighter
groupings, one or two representative populations could be selected for continued management, with the remainder to be excluded.

Decisions regarding the distribution of management resources to key D. taylorii populations will be made within each conservancy. The association between genetic similarity and geographical proximity has notable consequences at the level of the conservancy. Populations within each conservancy are generally widespread and, in some instances, their closest neighbour lies across a conservancy boundary (e.g. Minginui and Waikaremoana). The result of this is that populations do not group naturally into conservancies, upon a genetic basis, but tend to associate more closely with populations from other conservancies. It is therefore important that attention is not focused exclusively within the conservancy when selection of key populations is made, but that the national situation is also taken into account. By concentrating solely upon conserving the widest range of genetic diversity possible within the conservancy there is a risk that key populations at the national level could be excluded from management or, conversely, populations that constitute a less distinct population at the national level could be targeted for management efforts. This would lower the proportion of the species' overall genetic diversity that will receive management attention. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that management decisions made at the conservancy level should take into account the genetic status of each population at the national level.

## 5. Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the help received from staff at DOC who collected most of the samples and who provided details of the populations; Janet Oddy for assistance in the early stages of this study; Neil Fitzgerald for providing the Tarawera Plot sample; and the members of the Dactylantbus Recovery Group of DOC for their ongoing support of research into the genetic diversity of $D$. taylorii.

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## Appendix 1. Details of methodology

## DNA extraction

A block (c. $5 \mathrm{~mm}^{3}$ ) of inflorescence tissue was submerged in liquid nitrogen and ground to a fine powder using a mortar and pestle. A volume equivalent to $100 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ powder (c. 0.1 g ) was transferred to a 1.5 mL microcentrifuge tube and $600 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ pre-warmed $\left(60^{\circ} \mathrm{C}\right)$ CTAB buffer ( $2 \%(\mathrm{w} / \mathrm{v}) \mathrm{CTAB}, 1.4 \mathrm{M} \mathrm{NaCl}, 0.2 \%(\mathrm{w} / \mathrm{v})$ $\beta$-mercaptoethanol, 20 mM EDTA, 100 mM Tris- $\mathrm{HCl}(\mathrm{pH} 8.0)$, $1 \%$ polyvinylpyrrolidine (MW 40000 ) and $30 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ proteinase $\mathrm{K}(1 \mathrm{mg} / \mathrm{mL})$ were added. After briefly vortexing, an additional $1 \mu \mathrm{~L} \beta$-mercaptoethanol was added, and the mixture incubated for at least 60 min at $60^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$.

To extract DNA, $800 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ of chloroform:isoamyl alcohol (24:1) was added to the tube, the suspension inverted several times to mix, and then centrifuged for 5 min at 13000 rpm in a microcentrifuge. The supernatant was removed to a new tube, the chloroform:isoamyl alcohol extraction repeated, and the supernatant was again transferred to a new tube. To precipitate DNA, $400 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ cold $\left(-20^{\circ} \mathrm{C}\right)$ isopropanol was added to the extract, the suspension inverted several times to mix, and then left at $-20^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$ for 90 min .

The DNA was pelleted by centrifuging at 13000 rpm for 15 min in a microcentrifuge. The supernatant was discharged and the DNA resuspended in $500 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ NaCl , at $37^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$. This suspension was centrifuged at 3000 rpm for 5 min to remove precipitated polysaccharides, and the supernatant removed to a fresh tube. This was then incubated at $95^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$ for 30 min .

The DNA was precipitated by adding $500 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ cold $\left(-20^{\circ} \mathrm{C}\right)$ isopropanol, inverting to mix, and incubating at $-20^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$ for 20 min . DNA was pelleted by centrifugation at 13000 rpm for 15 min in a microcentrifuge, and the supernatant
discharged. The pellet was washed briefly in $500 \mu \mathrm{~L} 70 \%$ ethanol, followed by centrifugation at 13000 rpm for 5 min in a microcentrifuge. The supernatant was discharged and the wash repeated with $500 \mu \mathrm{~L} 95 \%$ ethanol, followed by centrifugation.

The supernatant was removed and the pellet vacuum-dried before resuspension in $100 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ TE ( 10 mM Tris-HCl, 1 mM EDTA, pH 8.0 ). $1 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ RNase ( $1 \mathrm{mg} / \mathrm{mL}$ ) was added and the suspension incubated at $37^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$ for at least 60 min .

DNA samples were quantified using a low quantity spectrophotometer (Genequant, Pharmacia), and with the same device quality was assessed by the ratio of absorbances $260 \mathrm{~nm}: 280 \mathrm{~nm}$. Samples with a $260: 280$ value less than 1.7 , and those with a quantity less than $30 \mathrm{ng} d s \mathrm{DNA} / \mu \mathrm{L}$, were discarded and later re-extracted. For polymerase chain reaction (PCR), extracts were diluted to a working concentration of $6 \mathrm{ng} / \mu \mathrm{L}$.

## PCR reaction mix and amplification conditions

A reaction volume of $25 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ was used, containing $1 \mu \mathrm{~L} 10 \mathrm{mM}$ dNTPs $(2.5 \mathrm{mM}$ each of dATP, dCTP, dGTP and dTTP) (Boehringer Mannheim), $4 \mu \mathrm{~L} 5 \mu \mathrm{M}$ primer (Operon Technologies Ltd.), $2.5 \mu \mathrm{~L} 10 \mathrm{x}$ PCR buffer containing $1.5 \mathrm{mM} \mathrm{MgCl}{ }_{2}$ (Boehringer Mannheim), $0.2 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ Taq DNA polymerase ( 5 units $/ \mu \mathrm{L}$ ) (Boehringer Mannheim), $4 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ template DNA ( $6 \mathrm{ng} / \mu \mathrm{L}$ ) and $13.3 \mu \mathrm{~L}$ sterile distilled water. Thin-walled 0.2 mL PCR tubes were used for the PCR reactions.

PCR was carried out using a Mastercycler gradient thermocycler (Eppendorf, USA). This thermocycler utilises a heated lid, so mineral oil was not used. Amplification conditions were: initial denaturation at $94^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$ for 2 min , followed by 34 cycles of denaturation at $94^{\circ} \mathrm{C}(1 \mathrm{~min})$, annealing at $46^{\circ} \mathrm{C}(1 \mathrm{~min})$ and elongation at $72^{\circ} \mathrm{C}(2 \mathrm{~min})$. An additional $72^{\circ} \mathrm{C}$ elongation step ( 10 min ) completed the programme.

## Appendix 2. RAPD data for Dactylanthus taylorii populations

Populations: $\mathrm{OP}=$ Opepe, $\mathrm{WH}=$ Whakaipo, $\mathrm{MIN}=$ Minginui, WK $=$ Waikaremoana, $\mathrm{PR}=$ Paeroa Range, $\mathrm{LBI}=$ Little Barrier Island, $\mathrm{SP}=\mathrm{South}$ Pihanga, $\mathrm{PUR}=\mathrm{Pureora}, \mathrm{OH}=$ Ohakune, WF = Waitaanga Forest, EG = Egmont National Park, TA = Te Araroa, PI = Pirongia, MAN = Mangaweka, MAM = Mamaku, HB = Hawke's Bay, TPT = Tarawera Plot

Population/ individual

OP-P16
OP-P10

## Primer

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## Population/

individual Primer
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## Population/

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## PUR

$0101010000000000100001000010000110001000000110100010001111101010010011 ? 1001001100000$ 010001000101000010010100001000110100100000011010001100111110101001001011001001100000 010101000101000010010100001001110100110000011010001100111110101001001011101001100000 $0101010001000000000 ? 0100001000010110110000001010001100111010101001001101001001100000$ 01010100010000000001010000100001001010000000101000 ? 000001010101001001111101001100000 $0100000010 ? 0100000101010001000000000110000001000001101011101010011001101000101100000$ $0101010101000000000 ? 011000100001011011000000101000 ? 00011111010$ ? ? 01001011001001100000 010011010000000010000110000000010110110000011000001100001110101101001011001011100000 $010011000101000010000100000000110110100000011110001100111110101001001001001001 ? 00000$ 01010100000100001000010000000011010010000000100000110011111010 ? ? 01001001001001000000

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## WF

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Population/

## individual

## MAN

## OP-P11

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## MAM

010101001000000000000100000010110000110000011000101000011010100001001001110001110000 010001001000000000000100000010110010100000011000000100011010100001001101110000110000 010101001000000000000110000010010000111000011100000100011010100001000011110000110000 010001001000000000000110000010110010110000011000000900011010100001001101110000110000 010101001000000000000100000010111100100000011100001100111010100001001011110000110000 $0101110010000000000001000000101100001110001110100011001110101000010011011100001 ? 0000$ $0101110010000000000001000000101100001100000110100011000110101000010000 ? 11100001 ? 0000$ 010111001000000000000100000010110000110000011000001100001010100001001111110000110000 $0101010010000000000001000000100100001110000110000011010110101000010010 ? 1110100110000$

## HB

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$01011010111010000000100000001001001011100001101100010110111011000010011110100 ? 000000$ $0101010011 ? 0 ? 0000000100000001001001011000001101100010110111011000110011010100 ? 000000$ 010110101110100000001000000010010010111000001011000101101110110001100111001000000000 $010110101 ? 1010000000100000001001001011000000101100010110111011000110111000100$ ? 000000 $0101000011 ? 00000000010000000000100 ? ? 11000001101100010110111011000100011000000 ? 000000$

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TPT
$1 \quad 0101010000001000000010000000001100111110000110001001011001101 ? 000110111100000 ? 000000$


[^0]:    Anon. 1995: Minutes of the Dactylanthus Recovery Group Meeting 1995. Department of Conservation, Wellington.

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