



Our Kiwiness helps keep the couch-fires burning



Dianne Bardsley

THERE is still a widespread belief that national varieties of English will die with the rapid expansion of global English as a lingua franca, a common world language for communication and trade.

However, there is no doubt that our variety of English is being enlivened by the day and will remain distinctive, just as the New Zealand culture will remain distinctive. In fact, terms like New Zealandness, for which we have citations of use since 1982, Kiwification (since 1986), Kiwify (in use since the 1990s), and Kiwitanga, indicate the existence of a unique cultural perspective as well as a unique approach to language.

Blends of Maori and English enhance our Kiwihood, our Kiwiism, and our Kiwiness, three terms that have been used in the media for up to 20 years.

One of the domains which contribute generously to our national lexicon is politics. Super-city and super-mayor now just slip off the tongues of media spokespeople. Treelords sits comfortably alongside Sealords as a Treaty settlement moniker.

In our culture of loving politicians and parties as much as hating them, we readily ascribe nicknames that are both fond and unkind. Robo-Goff is a recent addition. The present National Government has been described as a Teflon government (a global term) but our prime minister has been described specifically as a Teflon boy. Nothing bad sticks to John Key, we are told.

More sticky perhaps are the student antics that have entered our collective vo-

cabulary. Couch-fire and couch-burning and our distinctive form of Undie 500 joined the national lexis some years ago, while Hammered in Hanmer is rumoured to be joining it.

But it's possible that the general public would be more interested in the achievements of the young Tool Blacks, members of the New Zealand international WorldSkills team of tradespeople who compete in biennial world events that have been held since 1950.

Our lexicon is not only expanding through the behaviour of politicians and students but through our increasing specialist knowledge, particularly of our indigenous flora and fauna, i.e. through specificity. Some years ago we common folk identified lizards as either skinks or geckos. These days we have more than 80 specifically New Zealand identified and named skinks and geckos, including many with a geographic tag, such as the Wellington green gecko, previously known as the more generic barking gecko.

We now know that the Banks Peninsula jewelled gecko is distinctive from the Otago Peninsula jewelled gecko. The schist gecko is now named the Central Otago gecko, Falla's skink is now the Three Kings skink, etc.

A literal lizard lounge is being constructed on a farm in the Wairarapa where the Ponatahi Lizard Sanctuary encloses a hectare of land with a 1.6-metre-high predator-proof stainless steel fence. And DOC staff are adamant that we will find and name more of these elusive and threatened creatures. In the



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South Island, the Cromwell chafer beetle nature reserve looks after an endangered endemic population of rare chafer beetles, while in the Wairarapa the future of the Castlepoint daisy is enhanced by various insurance populations.

Our increasing environmental awareness has spawned other new terms, such as open space covenants, Life of the Trees covenants, and kawenata, a transliteration of covenant, sometimes modified as kawenta, which are covenants on Maori-owned land.

Other fauna which have escaped the eyes and ears of the public, including lexicographers, are some feral species, products of historic introduction to our land. In the sheep world, these include Arapawas, Herberts, Hokonuis, Mohakas and Pitt Islanders.

These remnants of mainly merino stocks from the 19th century are not the Shreks of the present-day, which have be-

longed at some stage to a domesticated flock. The feral flocks are not just of interest in being named after the location which they have inhabited for more than 100 years without human intervention, but are of value to geneticists studying their survival and their resistance to disease.

It is likely that these rare and threatened species, both indigenous and adapted, will become more widely known in our vocabularies for their frequent sightings rather than their rarity and we will collectively note that it's not only the higher forms of fauna that are responsible for our unique national wordlist.

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