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## Notes on flax spider mite, *Tetranychus moutensis* (Acari: Tetranychidae), a herbivore of New Zealand flax, *Phormium* species (Hemerocallidaceae)

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The tetranychid mite associated with New Zealand flax, *Phormium tenax* (Hemerocallidaceae) was first mentioned by Cumber (1954) in a paper about the insects and mites associated with New Zealand flax. He reports that Dr F.J. Newhook found the mites in 1949 at the Phormium Research Station, Paiaka near Shannon and that the mites were common. They were initially identified as *Septanchus* or *Tetranychus* species. The mites were rediscovered in 1969 in a flax plantation on the Moutoa Estate, near Shannon in southern North Island. The mites were abundant and caused a skin irritation on many workers cutting flax leaves. This rediscovery led to the formal description and naming of *Tetranychus moutensis* (Manson 1970).

*Tetranychus moutensis* has only been found in southern North Island and in the Auckland Region, but it is probably found throughout the country where its host plants grow. It has been found on both species of New Zealand flax, *P. tenax* and *P. cookianum*. The mites live in sheltered sites on the underside of leaves, often starting a colony around the moulted skin of a plant hopper or by a scale insect (Fig. 1). Mite feeding creates a pale area of leaf. The colonies sometimes appear red due to the high density of eggs (Fig. 2).



**FIGURE 1.** Colony of *Tetranychus moutensis* formed by passion vine hopper (*Scolypopa australis*) moulted skins on a leaf of New Zealand flax, *Phormium tenax* (Hemerocallidaceae) (photograph by Tim Holmes, copyright Plant & Food Research).