Rhys Gardner - an appreciation

Peter de Lange

Recently one of our Auckland Botanical Society members was honoured by having a new species of tree named after him; that person is Rhys Gardner (Fig. 1), and the tree is *Olearia gardneri* (Fig. 2). Based on the total number of wild individuals known (60) and their overall security *Olearia gardneri* is, next to *Pennantia baylisiana* (1 wild tree), *Carmichaelia muritai* (c. 25 trees), and *Metrosideros bartlettii* (c. 30 wild trees), our most seriously threatened tree. Formally described by Dr Michael Heads (Heads 1998), *Olearia gardneri* is a North Island allopatric segregate of *O. hectorii*, itself an endangered South Island endemic (cf. Cameron et al. 1995; Rogers 1996; Heads 1998). That Rhys is commemorated by this tree is especially fitting, for he is perhaps one of only 3 people in the past to have correctly distinguished that these North Island trees *were not* the same as *O. hectorii* s.s. *Olearia gardneri* differs from *O. hectorii* by its faster growth rate, smaller stature, smaller, trowel-shaped, toothed juvenile leaves, lighter green, generally smaller, ovate-elliptic to obcordate leaves which become distinctly glabrate with age, straight, deciduous, pilose leaf hairs, triangular, toothed and glabrate phyllaries, and white flowers. By way of contrast *O. hectorii* has a much slower rate of growth, regularly attains a much greater size, possesses larger, clavate, toothed juvenile foliage, and distinctive grey, broadly elliptic leaves, which retain their curled, felted hairs throughout their life. The phyllaries of *O. hectorii* are broadly lanceolate, untoothed, and densely covered in grey flannel-like hairs, while the flowers in this species are sulphur yellow.

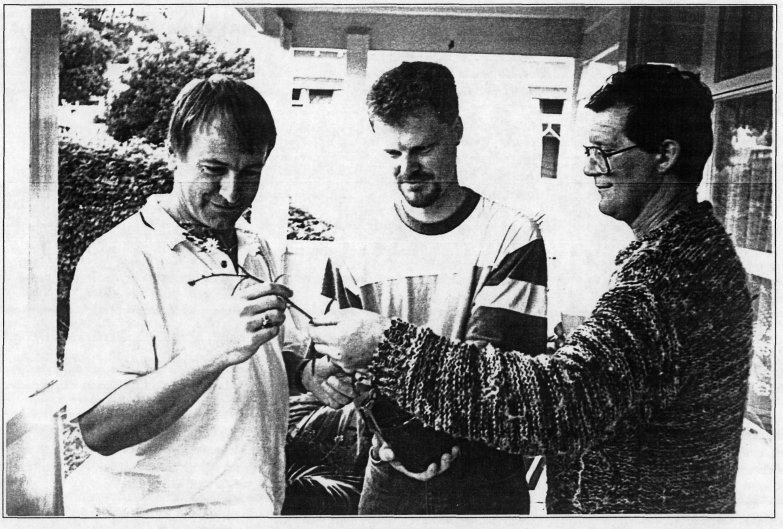

Fig. 1. From left to right, Paul Champion, Peter de Lange and Rhys Gardner take time out to admire a potted specimen of the indigenous oxtongue (*Picris burbidgei*) - a threatened species known from New Zealand, Eastern Australia, Norfolk, Chatham and the Hawai'ian Islands. Photo: *Gillian Crowcroft*, December 1995.

Within its North Island range *Olearia gardneri* is now largely confined to the vicinity of Taihape, though it once grew near the Kaweka Range in Hawkes Bay, and five trees persist in the eastern Wairarapa. At all sites the Department of Conservation in conjunction with private landowners is carefully managing the species - as the majority of known sites occur on private land.

Aside from *O. gardneri*, Rhys's contribution to New Zealand botany, or perhaps more correctly mycology, goes by way of the discovery of a novel species of smut, *Ustilago gardneri*, apparently endemic to *Cyperus ustulatus*.

Rhys discovered this novelty whilst examining plants at Western Springs. Its discovery is indicative of Rhys's observant and inquiring nature, for instead of fobbing off the smut, as an irritating phenomenon ruining his plant specimens he passed material on to experts to determine this smuts identity, thus earning an unexpected - and little known – mycological honour.

So much of honours - who is Rhys Gardner? I remember asking this question of John Smith-Dodsworth many years ago, earning from John little more than a peculiar grin. Aside from that, all I knew of Rhys until I moved to Auckland in 1993 was his distinctive, bold script which usually covered my interim AK herbarium labels when my identifications had gone astray. Since 1993 I have had the unique pleasure of getting to know Rhys firsthand, so in the interests of making the work of any future Andrew Thomson or Eric Godley that much easier, I am writing this article to record some little known facets of Rhys's background. This task has proved more difficult than it may sound (even if the subject is alive), mainly because it is Rhys's nature to be rather self-effacing about his work. However, when I had pestered him enough for him to see that I was quite serious, Rhys provided a very thoughtful and meticulous presentation of life and scientific career. I don't intend to share all of this with you - thus saving Rhys some embarrassment. Instead I thought, I'd "cream off" the surface and share with journal readers a little of Rhys's botanical contributions.

Rhys is an Aucklander born and bred. His family hails from the Kaipara, where a magnificent house "Mataia" still stands by Glorit. He went to school at Mount Albert Grammar, matriculating in 1966. At the University of Auckland he first attained a B.Sc. (Hons) First Class in Botany in 1971, followed by a Ph.D. in the same subject field in 1977 - revising *Alseuosmia*, a difficult genus and family, whose secrets Rhys, under the watchful eye of Jack Rattenbury, unravelled over seven years of study. His two papers (Gardner 1978A, 1978B) remain the most definitive, thorough, and cautious assessment available of this genus, as well as serving as a studied lesson for other "players" in the field.

Following his doctorate Rhys worked for several years as a temporary botanical ecologist and taxonomist for the former DSIR Botany Division at Mt Albert, Auckland. Then came a stint of melon-growing, which was at first supplemented by, and later given up in favour of a position as the consulting botanist for Bioresearchers Ltd. At the Auckland Museum Herbarium (AK) Rhys has been a volunteer since 1979, assisting with specimen identification, curation, and research. In recognition of his work there Rhys was made a Research Associate in 1990.

The Gardner herbarium is now in excess of 9000 numbers. His specimens are primarily lodged at AK, though I have frequently seen Gardner duplicates in AKU, CANU, CHR, NZFRI, WAIK, and WELT. Gardner specimens have also turned up in collections I have borrowed from AD, BISH, CANB, K, MEL, MO, NSW, and P. As for collecting localities, aside from some very obscure parts of New Zealand, Rhys's collections span the Pacific with specimens in AK from Rarotonga, Fiji, Norfolk, the Solomon and Chatham Islands. He has also made substantial collections from New Caledonia, New Guinea and parts of Canberra. From these collections Rhys has described, as new to science, five plant taxa: 3 species, 1 subspecies and 1 forma. (Gardner 1997A, 1997B, 1997C)

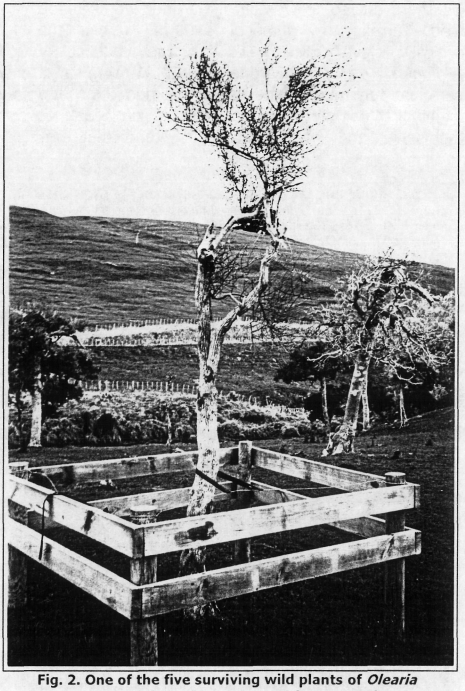

Fig. 2. One of the five surviving wild plants of *Olearia gardneri* known from the eastern Wairarapa. This tree, growing on private land at Kourarau, in the Maungaraki Range has given rise to 500 seedlings. These seedlings are being used for the on-site restoration of this species. Photo: Peter de Lange, April 1998.

With John Early, Rhys also has disclosed the life history of Moreton Bay fig wasps (Gardner & Early 1996). His more recent publications also include revisions of *Macropiper* (Gardner 1997A), *Selaginella* (Gardner 1997D), and detailed, sometimes playfully provocative papers on *Beilschmiedia* seed structure (Gardner 1996), and plant orthography (Gardner 1998).

However, to most Auckland Botanical Society members, Rhys is best remembered for his eighty-two or so *Auckland Botanical Society Newsletter/ Journal* articles and three *Botanical Society Bulletins*, encompassing a wide and varied diet of botanical reading!

It would be fair to say that the content of some of Rhys's written works may leave some Botanical Society members (let alone anyone else) a little baffled, but for those who delight in cryptic and dry wit there are some wonderful Gardner works to be read. Certainly my personal favourites remain the cynically clever notes, "Toward the concept of *ecological district"* (Gardner 1988, 1992A) - a pertinent reminder to the self-proclaimed "high and mighty" that they need to take a good look at themselves and the classification systems that they foist on the public. Following these, who could not be more than puzzled by the carefully constructed "A plate of beans" (Gardner 1992B) - which I am assured has more to it than meets the eye (P.B. Heenan *pers. comm.*). Any self-respecting Biosecurity Officer or connoisseur of oriental foods should heed the gut-wrenching warning about loog-yee lollies (Gardner 1994A), while the mordant advice about pampas grass (*Cortaderia jubata* and *C. selloana*) eradication should not be overlooked by those less feline-disposed (Gardner 1994B).

Lastly, for those who know Rhys on a personal level, there is the wonder of working with the type of inquisitive mind that would seriously contemplate licking *Gahnia* leaves to determine their scabridity! Or stress the importance of purchasing from the Warehouse a "Mr Thingy", and scatter *Pennantia* leaves over his car dashboard to watch them dry and maybe give clues to their anatomy.

So on behalf of the society, those who have benefited from Rhys's skilled plant determinations, and also the countless individuals who have had their gardens manicured, basements or drains dug, and truck loads of soil moved, I would like to wish Rhys continued success in his botanical endeavours.

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A Serendipitous Series of Coincidences

Geoff Davidson

Not all NZ native plant enthusiasts are found in New Zealand. Equally many of New Zealand's botanists have gone overseas to pursue careers involving the plants of other climes. Some expatriates find themselves pining for foliar reminders of their roots. I had the happy occasion to meet one, Harold Moores, whilst he was browsing through the plants in the nursery, and during our conversation it transpired that he was a West Aucklander by birth, living in London with a holiday home in the south of Spain. That gave enough clues for me to correctly hazard a guess that we had hanging on our walls a work of art created by his wife. It is a collograph (embossed & coloured) depicting a mountain in Spain, that had appealed to