

Obituaries

David Roger Given

8 November 1943 – 27 November 2005



David Roger Given was the Botanical Services Curator of the Christchurch Botanic Gardens from 14 July 2003 until his death on 27 November 2005, aged 62, after a short illness. During his last year in office David wrote a large part of the draft plan, setting out the future vision for Hagley Park and the Christchurch Botanic Gardens. His expertise in implementing this vision will be sorely missed.

David was born in Nelson on 8 November 1943. His parents Bruce and Brenda Given, brought him up to love music, nature, sport and fostered these interests by example. His father was a very able entomologist, botanist and geologist and also a violinist, and David's interests spanned most of these fields too. Some of David's early years were spent camping around Australia, where his father was collecting insects. Here David developed a great love for the outdoors. Later the family moved back to Nelson and David went to Nelson College.

In 1962 he attended the University of Canterbury where he graduated with a first-class honours degree in botany and went on to study New Zealand mountain daisies, *Celmisia*, for his PhD degree. David joined Botany Division,

DSIR (Department of Scientific and Industrial Research) in 1965 as a plant taxonomist, eventually becoming, from 1974 to 1987, the Keeper of the Herbarium, a collection of pressed, dried and labelled plants, all stored according to a scientific classification. He also had a passion for ferns becoming one of New Zealand leading fern authorities.

During his term as Herbarium Keeper David was one of the instigators of the New Zealand National Herbarium Network bringing together all the herbaria to focus on a common good. He set up wider links with the Australian herbaria which continue today. During this time the number of plant specimens in the Botany Division herbarium grew very rapidly and he and a colleague were asked to plan new extensions to the building. David was also aware of just how valuable the information on the plant specimen labels was and he began to plan for the revolutionary idea of computerising the labels so that this information and plant distribution maps could be more easily made available. The computer era was just beginning. Initially the label data had to be put on to punched cards which were sent to Wellington for reading on the only DSIR computer in the country – a lengthy and cumbersome process. But he persevered. Today, data is entered into desk top computers at Landcare Research (the successor organisation to the DSIR) at Lincoln and you can go into the Allan Herbarium internet site and look up the label information, and see plant species distribution maps – all from your own home PC. With such easy access to information, we can easily take for granted the huge amount of time taken to

compile the correct information, and can forget the original vision that David and his colleagues had all those years ago.

In 1973–1974, David gained a Canadian National Research Council Post-Doctoral Fellowship which took him and his family to Ottawa, to research the outliers of isolated arctic–alpine plants around Lake Superior. These plants were threatened in their habitat and this sparked his abiding interest in New Zealand's threatened plants and plant conservation. On his return to DSIR Lincoln he prepared the paper: "Conservation of rare and threatened plant taxa in New Zealand: Some principles." Some six years later he published his first book: *Rare and Endangered Plants of New Zealand* followed quickly by the *NZ Red Data Book*, co-authored with Gordon Williams, all about endangered species. David's interest in plant conservation never flagged.

In 1986 David gave the Banks Memorial Lecture hosted by the RNZIH. Illustrated with his wonderful photographs, he spoke about the importance of botanic gardens in ensuring good conservation. This lecture was published by the Institute ("Botanic gardens and conservation: the road from Las Palmas" 1986 Banks Memorial Lecture. *Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture, Annual Journal 14*: 3–9).

Leaving DSIR at the end of 1991, David's career changed direction when he began teaching at Lincoln University, doing ecological consulting work and ecotourism which meant he was often travelling around the world to exciting, exotic places. During these years David was involved in some 16 different international conservation organisations. And

he took the opportunity to take lots of exquisite plant photos that he used to illustrate the many public talks that he gave.

As a lecturer at Lincoln University, David was able to develop new courses in Conservation Horticulture, Landscape Ecology, and Biodiversity. He developed a South East Asian version of Ecology and Biogeography for first year students and taught the first two modules of the course in Singapore.

In 1993 David became a member of the RNZIH and in the same year was made an Associate of Honour of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture (AHRIH). He conceived of and was a member of the organising committee for the highly successful RNZIH conference "Greening the city: bringing biodiversity back into the urban environment" held in October 2003 (see <http://www.rnzih.org.nz/pages/conference2003.htm> for more details).

A few years ago, in a remote part of the Blue Mountains of Australia, a grove of living fossil trees, the Wollemi pines (*Wollemia nobilis*) was discovered. These had only been known previously from the fossil record. The plants were brought into cultivation and studied by the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. The Wollemi pine has become an icon species for plant conservation in Australia. As a

mark of the esteem in which David is held in plant conservation circles, he had a grove of five Wollemi pines named after him. These were auctioned off in Sydney and the money will go to plant conservation projects in New Zealand through the NZ Plant Conservation Network.

David was very eager to accept a gift of a Wollemi pine from Sydney for the Botanic Gardens in Christchurch and was somewhat frustrated by the lengthy processes of the Environmental Risk Management Authority (ERMA New Zealand) in Wellington before the importation of this new species would be permitted. Still, with his usual perseverance he was able to triumph over the bureaucracy.

David Given has been called the founder of the New Zealand native plant conservation movement. At their annual conference on 14 August 2005, the NZ Plant Conservation Network awarded David a Distinguished Life Membership. During his acceptance speech he spoke of the special privilege of mentoring younger people in plant conservation and in initiating projects which he knew others would take over from him and see through to completion.

David described himself as a researcher, a strategic planner, administrator, and communicator – specializing in studies of

biological diversity, conservation biology, taxonomy and ecology, ethnobotany, and the sustainable use of natural resources including tourism. He had a strong belief in the fundamental place of nature in people's lives and the role of landscapes and biological diversity in contributing to a sense of place and belonging for people. Equity and justice were fundamental issues for him. He set high standards for himself. He had a very high regard for family values, and for commitment to people and to organizations with which he was involved. With his wife Karina and his family he shared a deep personal spiritual faith. On the Sunday before he died David preached on "How green is our God" illustrated throughout with his wonderful photographs and he accompanied the singing on his violin. Just before he died David knew that his name had been put forward for the New Zealand Order of Merit.

It is hoped that David's plan for the development of Hagley Park and the Christchurch Botanic Gardens will be part of his legacy. David's lasting memorial will be his vision of New Zealand plant conservation that his colleagues and students will carry forward into the future.

From a eulogy compiled by Murray J. Parsons; parsons_whanau@xtra.co.nz