

## John Kenneth Bartlett (1945 – 1986)

John Bartlett, an only child, was born in Hamilton, New Zealand, on 7 December 1945. From an early age he showed the independence and thirst for knowledge that were attributes of his later life, as were his love of music, especially that of the organ, and an interest in botany. He was dux of Marist Brothers' School in Hamilton, and went on to study mathematics at Auckland, Brisbane and finally Sydney University, where he gained his master's degree, helped financially by working for a furniture maker. He returned to New Zealand and a teaching career at Auckland Grammar School and at Sacred Heart College, where he was head of science at the time of his death.

In the early 1970s he became interested in the flowering plants, seaweeds, ferns and mosses of North Auckland. Possibly helped by his fluency in Māori, he gained access to large areas of land little visited by botanists, and the speed at which he collected plants led to his nickname "Hurricane Bartlett". Botanical horizons widened when he met Tony Druce and joined the Wellington Botanical Society's summer field trips to the mountains of Northwest Nelson.

Bryophytes were Bartlett's major botanical interest, closely followed by lichens, and his unusual finds led to worldwide correspondence with specialists, and interchange of specimens. He collaborated in the writing of several bryological papers, and in 1983 worked on a revision of the moss genus *Blindia* in D H Vitt's laboratory in Edmonton, Canada. On his subsequent two-month trip through Europe, he met many bryophyte and lichen specialists on their home ground. His serious interest in lichens began in 1977 when he gladly agreed to collect from North Auckland to help fill many of the gaps in the New Zealand lichen flora then in preparation, and really took off with the discovery of a presumed Australian endemic, *Thysanothecium hookeri*, at Puponga and Ahipara. He not only made many new discoveries from New Zealand and the Southern Hemisphere, but also mastered most of the lichen names then current.

By nature John Bartlett was a rather solitary person, a deep thinker and an enthusiastic correspondent. He pursued a range of interests with determination and success, read widely in several languages and travelled extensively in New Zealand and overseas. Self-trained, and collecting only in his spare time from a dedicated teaching career, he made a unique contribution to New Zealand botany, which is commemorated in the names of several mosses, and the rare white rātā, *Metrosideros bartlettii*.

He discovered the unusual tree in Radar Bush near Cape Reinga in 1975, but it was another ten years before flowers were collected, enabling its scientific description to be made.

John Kenneth Bartlett's significant contribution to New Zealand botany spanned little more than ten years. He died in Auckland on 1 May 1986.



### ***Metrosideros bartlettii***

*Metrosideros bartlettii* is a tree of up to 30 metres, with a trunk to a metre or more in diameter. Its small white flowers, made up of a mass of stamens, are borne in November and December, and seed ripens in March and April. As well as flower colour, it can also be distinguished from northern rātā (*Metrosideros robusta*) by its leaves, often twisted, which taper to a point at the tip, while those of the northern rātā are notched, and the white or whitish-grey bark that peels easily into soft flakes. It is known only from three forest remnants in the Far North. Seedlings epiphytic on trees or tree ferns have been discovered, but few mature trees are known to exist in the wild. Destruction by fire or browsing is a risk, and the species is classified as endangered. Although Bartlett's rātā is in cultivation, most garden plants are descended from a single tree.