

# Ferdinand Lukas Bauer (1760 – 1826)

Ferdinand Lukas Bauer was born on 20 January 1760, at Feldsberg, Austria, the third son of Lukas Bauer, court painter to the Prince of Liechtenstein. The children were still infants when their father died the following year, and were young teenagers when their artistic talents were recognised by a priest and keen botanist, Father Norbert Boccius, Abbot of Feldsberg. He encouraged them in botanical drawing, and commissioned 15-year-old Ferdinand to paint a series of highly finished flower studies, which later passed into the Liechtenstein collection.



## ***Rhopalostylis baueri***

*Rhopalostylis* (Greek 'club-shaped style') is a small genus of palms; woody plants with tall erect stems bearing a terminal crown of large pinnate leaves. In New Zealand, *Rhopalostylis baueri* is commonly referred to as the Kermadec nikau and is found only on Raoul Island in the Kermadec group. It reaches 10 metres or more in height, with a trunk up to 30-cm diameter ringed with scars of fallen leaves. The prominent crown shaft formed by overlapping leaf branches, is 50–60 cm long. The inflorescence, reddish-pink or white, appears below the leaves in multiple spikes in December–January. The globose fruits, green at first, turn a brick red when ripe and are a favourite food of birds. It can be faster growing and more popular in gardens than the common, variable mainland nikau, *Rhopalostylis sapida*, which is best distinguished from *Rhopalostylis baueri* by its elliptic, oblong, smaller fruit.

Around 1780 the brothers moved to Vienna, where Baron Nikolaus von Jacquin employed Ferdinand to illustrate his lavish botanical work *Icones Plantarum Rariorum* (1781-93). In 1784 visiting Oxford Professor John Sibthorp was so impressed with Ferdinand's work he engaged him to become his natural history painter and travelling companion. They left Vienna in 1786 and travelled widely in the Mediterranean before going to England at the end of 1787. There, from his numerous observations and sketches, Ferdinand prepared the finished illustrations for Sibthorp and Smith's *Flora Graeca* (1806-40). Possibly at Ferdinand's suggestion, his brother Franz (Francis, b. 1758) visited England. A typically generous offer from Sir Joseph Banks persuaded Francis to stay, and in 1790 he settled as a permanent draughtsman at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, where he remained until his death fifty years later.

Ferdinand Bauer, however, had a taste for adventure, and in 1800 Banks arranged for him to join Matthew Flinders' Australian expedition as botanical artist. The *Investigator's* company also included landscape artist William Westall and the young Scottish botanist Robert Brown, who Bauer worked closely with, both during the actual survey and afterwards, not only painting, but also collecting specimens. It was five years before Bauer reached England again, with over 2000 drawings made. He finished many of them with painstaking detail for publication, but his perfectionist standards meant that he had to execute every part of the work himself, and his *Illustrations Florae Novae Hollandiae* (1813) was abandoned after publication of only fifteen of his plates. Ten more were published in the atlas to Flinders' *A Voyage to Terra Australis* (1814), but greatly disappointed at the commercial failure of his *Illustrations*, Ferdinand Bauer returned to Austria in 1814 and bought a small house near the gardens of Schönbrunn. He completed his series of finished drawings of Australian plants and animals, made botanical excursions in the Styrian and Austrian Alps and visited his English friends once more, before his death at Vienna, on 17 March 1826.

Ferdinand and Franz Bauer have been hailed as "two of the finest draughtsmen in the whole history of botanical art". Flinders named Cape Bauer in South Australia after his botanical artist. The name of Bauer is also commemorated in the plant genus *Bauera* and several mainly Australian plant species, including the palm *Rhopalostylis baueri*, which is native to Norfolk Island (the type locality) and to New Zealand's Kermadec Islands.