

Geoffrey Thomas Sandford Baylis (1913 – 2003)

Geoffrey Baylis, the son of Gerald Thomas de Sandford Baylis and Kathleen Daisy, née Aston, was born at Palmerston North on 24 November 1913. After a few years the family moved north and lived briefly in Auckland, where Geoff attended Remuera Primary School, before settling at Campbells Bay. Geoff and his sister Geraldine were then educated at Takapuna and Campbells Bay primary schools, and were foundation pupils of the new co-educational Takapuna Grammar School. With a family background of scientific interests, Geoff took naturally to the chemistry and botany offered to both senior boys and girls at Takapuna Grammar. He was dux in 1930 and 1931, won a University Entrance Scholarship, and graduated BSc at Auckland University College in 1934, with a senior scholarship in botany. At the start of his last BSc year his mother shouted him a trip on the Auckland Museum's expedition to Three Kings on the ketch *Will Watch*, and thus began Geoff's lifelong love of those islands and the far north.

In 1935 he studied for his MSc, writing a thesis on the mangrove in New Zealand. He was awarded a post-graduate scholarship in science, and studied for a doctorate in plant pathology at Imperial College, London, returning to New Zealand in late 1938 to become assistant mycologist in the Plant Diseases Division of DSIR. A lieutenant in the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve 1940–1945, he was mentioned in dispatches in 1943. From 1945 until he retired in 1978 he was head of Otago University's botany department.

The Hellaby Trust, established in 1959 to promote and fund student research into the ecology and sustainable management of New Zealand's indigenous grasses, is one example of the many scientific and cultural organisations in which he was involved. He was one its three founding governors, and of his 42 years' service, the last 33 years were as chairman. In 1961 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

Geoff Baylis was regarded as the father of Three Kings botany. Over a period of 50 years, he made around thirteen trips there, studying the rare and endemic plant species, and the remarkable regeneration following the extermination of goats in 1946. Two of the most rare endemics found by him were single plants: *Tecomanthe speciosa*, a robust liane seen flowering only once in the wild in 1945, and *Pennantia baylisiana*, which he discovered in 1946. Both have been propagated and are now in cultivation.

The Botanical Society of Otago instituted an annual lecture named in his honour, and in Auckland, where he had gone to be closer to his family after becoming ill, Geoff watched several times a recorded video of the inaugural lecture held in October 2002. A lover of good music, the creator of a wonderful garden, a leader and teacher of much more than facts and ideas, Geoffrey Baylis died in Auckland on 31 December 2003.



Pennantia baylisiana

Pennantia is a genus of four Australasian species, two of which are New Zealand endemics. *Pennantia baylisiana* is a rare multi-trunked small tree up to 5 metres high in the wild, with pale brown to white bark and very large broad glossy curled leaves, 120–160mm long, widest towards the tip. Small, greenish-white flowers in clusters along branches are functionally female, although viable fruit is sometimes set, the purple fruit, 10 mm long, containing a single seed. Unlike *kaikōmako*, *Pennantia corymbosa*, it has no juvenile divaricating form. Only one tree is known in the wild, on Manawa Tahi/Great Island in the Three Kings group, where it grows in coastal forest on a steep fern and herb-covered slope.