

John Edward Braggins (1944 –)

A child of the Second World War, John Braggins was born in Wellington on 9 August 1944 and adopted by descendants of the early Wairarapa settlers Edward George Braggins (1842–1919) and his wife Sarah (née Sayer). John was raised in Dannevirke until his first year of secondary school, when the family moved to Wellington and he went to Rongotai College. His parents bought him Dobbie's fern book and allowed him to build ferneries in both their Dannevirke and Wellington gardens, while his mother specialised in vegetables and ornamentals, and his father cared for the lawns. At Victoria University John was involved in the student-run biological society and went on many of its field trips and those of the Wellington Botanical Society. After attaining his BSc in 1966 and MSc on the fern *Botrichium* in 1969 he moved to Auckland where he was awarded his PhD from the University of Auckland in 1975 on the fern genus *Pteris*, and became senior lecturer in the botany department.



John Braggins, Ruapehu, 2013

Bragginsella anomala

An endemic monotypic genus, *Bragginsella anomala* (Greek *anomalus* 'irregular; out of the ordinary') is a diminutive, light green to red-green liverwort that grows erectly through other mosses. So far it is known only from Temple Basin, Arthur's Pass, on the steep-sided walls of a deep stream draining an alpine basin, or in dark, deeply shaded sites under overhanging tussock and sedges. It is vulnerable to over-collection and human disturbance, and until further populations of this unusual liverwort are found, it remains at serious risk of extinction.

Early in his career he became fascinated by the bryophytes, and when botanist Jessica Beever indicated her growing interest in the mosses he was happy to concentrate on the less known liverworts and hornworts. With skill and dedication, he built up an international reputation as New Zealand's leading resident hepaticologist. His enthusiasm was contagious, his field trips legendary and inspiring, and several of the PhD students he mentored went on to international careers as bryologists. Forced into retirement in 2000 by destrukturering of the University of Auckland, he became an honorary research associate at the herbarium of the Auckland War Memorial Museum where his specimens are now housed, and a freelance botanical consultant.

He has travelled widely, including overland across Asia with his wife 1975–77; sabbaticals based in Sri Lanka 1980–81 and Kenya 1990–91; January–February 2000 at the Field Museum Chicago on a Visiting Scientist Scholarship (which gave him a taste of a colder and more seasonal climate) and the Pacific to research and obtain images for *Tree Ferns*, published jointly with Mark Large in 2004. He also collected, visited important herbariums and made contact with other bryologists overseas, and has hosted numerous visitors to New Zealand. His expertise has been appreciated at annual John Child Bryophyte and Lichen Workshops since their inception in 1983, and he has played a key role in the conservation of bryophytes. His passion for liverworts includes photographing them, and his extensive record of specimens in both the field and the lab is a valuable resource. In addition to more than sixty co-authored articles and scientific papers, John Braggins has helped to describe at least nine liverworts.

Two sons and a daughter were born of his 25-year marriage (1970–95) to Raewyn Francis; his marriage to Thelma in 1999 gained him two stepdaughters. Both wives have been very supportive of his absorption in plants. His other interests range from algae, ferns and lichens to pollination of podocarps and growing cycads.

In 1997 his work was acknowledged in the generic name of a rare liverwort, *Bragginsella anomala*, known only from one site in Arthur's Pass National Park. In 2014 another new liverwort in the genus *Lepidozia* was given the specific name *bragginsiensis*, honouring Dr John E Braggins for his contribution to botany and bryology in this country. For his outstanding botanical knowledge, his ability to inspire interest in bryology and his contribution to the New Zealand flora, especially the poorly known plant group of liverworts, he was awarded the Allan Mere by the New Zealand Botanical Society in 2013.