

## John Child (1922 – 1984)

**B**orn in Dunedin in 1922, John Child was the eldest son of a labourer. After first attending Beaumont Primary School, he took lessons by correspondence for several years before continuing his education at Lawrence District High School. He left school to work as a clerk in the Department of Education at Wellington, and while there decided to pursue a career in teaching. However, the Second World War and four years' service in the RNZAF curtailed his training at Dunedin Teachers' College.

After the war he attended Otago University, graduating in 1948 with a Master of Arts degree in economics. He taught at Lawrence District High School for the next two or three years, and studied for his Bachelor of Commerce degree; he was the first Donald Reid fellow in economics at Otago University. After completing a doctorate in philosophy at Oxford University, he returned to New Zealand and taught general science for three years at Tauranga. Finding few books on the identification of the local fauna, he produced a small cyclostyled manual of the common shells found on the Bay of Plenty Coast – the beginning of Periwinkle Press.

His next ten years were in Australia, where he lectured at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. During this period his interest in natural history was rekindled; he took a number of university courses in biology, and wrote introductory books on natural history subjects: sea shells, insects, rocks and minerals, spiders, seashore life, pond and stream life, alpine life, trees of the Sydney region, wildflowers of the Sydney region and collecting specimens.

His interest in bryophytes and lichens led to *The Mosses of New Zealand*, co-authored with Jessica Beever and K W Allison. First published in 1964, it was revised and republished in 1992.

When he returned to New Zealand in 1967 John went back to Otago University as a research fellow, and soon became involved in such organisations as the Otago Peninsula Trust, Friends of the Museum and Historic Places Trust. In his spare time he began a natural history survey of the Rock and Pillar Range, and collaborated with naturalist and teacher William Martin in the publication of *New Zealand Lichens* (1972), for which he contributed the photographs. *The Liverworts of New Zealand* by Allison and Child followed, in 1975. Over the years Child wrote about twenty books on flora and fauna, many of them published by Periwinkle Press.

His beloved mountains and forests, seashores and wetlands were the source of endless subjects to study, and he was always willing and able to pass on his knowledge. He was described as a man with personal charm and a great sense of humour, and his death in Dunedin on 10 November 1984, at the age of 62, was a great loss to his colleagues and friends.

John Child Bryophyte and Lichen Workshops held annually continue to provide opportunities for enthusiasts to meet, learn and share their knowledge. He is also commemorated in an alpine plant *Kelleria childii*, described by Michael Heads in a 1990 taxonomic revision of the long-time controversial genera *Kelleria* and *Drapetes*.

### ***Kelleria childii***

*Kelleria* is a southern alpine and subantarctic genus of trailing or mat-forming plants centred in New Zealand. *Kelleria childii* forms dense moss-like cushions with tiny four-petalled, persistent flowers. It is confined to bare rocky areas above or on the margins of snowbanks on northern and central Otago mountains. It is a favoured food source of the larva of *Notoreas*, the New Zealand genus of day-flying moths characteristic of the area. All the species feed as larvae on the daphne family of plants, *Kelleria*, *Drapetes* and *Pimelea*.

