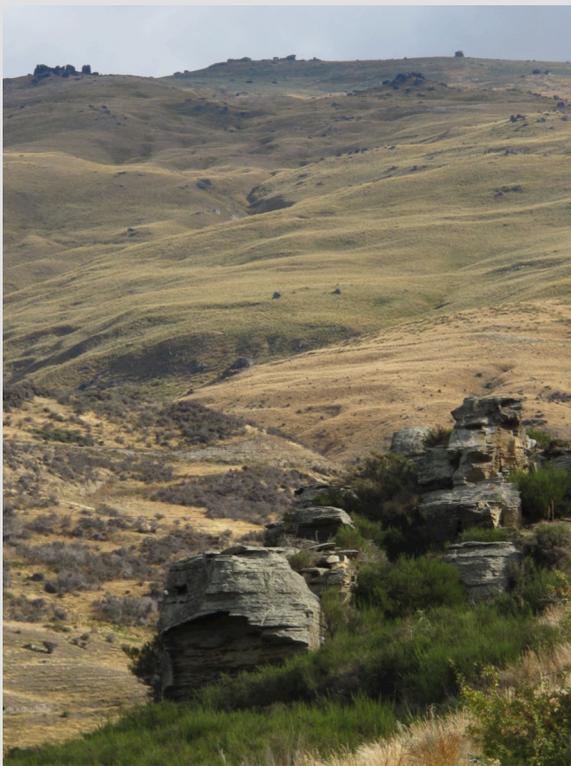


# Henry Eamonn Connor (1922 – 2016)

Henry Eamonn Connor was born in Wellington on 4 August 1922. His father James Connor, a stonemason, had emigrated from Ireland. Widowed with three children, James was building the Catholic Church at Takaka in 1917–18 when he met and later married Maggie Byrne, whose parents farmed at Hamama. Henry, the eldest of their children, attended St Patrick's College in Wellington until he was fifteen, and left to work as a clerical cadet at the Plant Research Bureau – the beginning of his interest in botany. Dr H H Allan selected him for technical training for Botany Division, DSIR, in 1942; he completed his BSc as a part-time student at Victoria University College in 1948, and his MSc (First class honours) in 1950. Sheer determination got him walking again after being hospitalised with polio for six months in 1948–49.

Before and during the war years 1939–45 the newly formed Plant Research Bureau was focused on economic botany. Connor was steered towards assisting Victor Zotov in this field, and made grasses the focus of his 70-year career.



Central Otago hills, Roxburgh, 2013

## *Connorochloa tenuis*

*Connorochloa tenuis* is an endemic grass of open short tussock grassland in the eastern North and South islands. The suffix *chloa* indicates that the name refers to a grass; *tenuis* 'thin', describes the narrow bronze leaf blades. The culms are easily detached and sprawl over the ground. Once regarded as widespread, it is now thought to be in decline.

The southern genera were little known when he began his work; Botany Division aimed for publication of a grass flora in the 1950s, but it would be almost another fifty years before it happened. Meanwhile, working at Botany Division he met Helen Clark, also a botanist; they married in 1951, had four children (Katherine, Rachel, Frances and Dennis) and six grandchildren. In 1974 Connor became assistant director of Botany Division and head of the taxonomy section, and in 1978 he was awarded a DSc from the University of Canterbury. From 1980 until his compulsory retirement after forty years' service in 1982, he was an able director of the division. However, he continued his research and writing at Canterbury University for the next thirty years and made a valuable contribution to university activities.

Early in his career Connor began compiling information about plants that endangered livestock. This was published in *The Poisonous Plants in New Zealand* (1951, 1977, 1992), and in 2009 he co-authored *Plants that Poison: a New Zealand Guide* with John Fountain from Otago National Poisons Centre. During his long career he published over 160 papers, at least half of them when "retired". He became recognised internationally as an expert on the grasses, their structure, chemistry, genetics and taxonomy, his lifetime investigations culminating in the production, with Elizabeth Edgar, of Volume V of the *Flora of New Zealand* (2000, 2010) covering all the native and exotic grasses.

His contribution to New Zealand botany was recognised in numerous honours and awards, including fellowship of the Royal Society of New Zealand in 1983, and jointly with Elizabeth Edgar in 2000, the society's prestigious Hutton Medal. In 2002 he was made a Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to botany. In 2009 the genus *Connorochloa* was established in honour of "Dr H E Connor, whose careful observation and cytological studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of New Zealand's grasses".

He set high standards, both of himself and his colleagues, and was always willing to share his scientific knowledge and insights. He loved literature, fine food and wine, and was president and cellarmaster of the Wine and Food Society. Actively involved in the Catholic Church throughout his life, he was a member and chairman of the Rochester and Rutherford Hall Trust Boards and chairman of the parish council. Henry Connor died at Christchurch on 26 July 2016, nine days short of his 94th birthday.