

Peter James de Lange (1966 –)

Peter de Lange was born at Hamilton on 28 July 1966, the third and youngest son of Dutch immigrants. His father Wim de Lange, a panelbeater and mechanic, and mother Lena (née Elscot), an occupational therapist, had arrived in 1960 with their first child Willem; their second son John was born the following year. Peter's early fascination with insects and other small wildlife developed into an interest in plants during his association with the Hamilton Junior Naturalist Club – from 1972 when his brothers joined and his parents helped at camps, then as a member, and from 1983 to 1987 on the staff. He progressed through Hillcrest Primary School, Berkley Normal Middle School and Hillcrest High School, distinguishing himself by winning the ICI Science Fair in 1983 and representing New Zealand at San Diego in 1984.

Leaving school from the sixth form to study at the University of Waikato, he graduated BSc (1987) double major in biological and earth sciences, and MSc with first-class honours (1990), with a thesis on the Late Quaternary development of the Kopouatai peat bog. His summer work as an interpreter and botanist for DSIR's Botany Division and Lands & Survey deepened his interest, and he undertook part-time, and completed in 2008, a PhD in plant biosystematics, studying *Kunzea* at the University of Auckland. A caver for about seven years, he explored mainly low grade calcareous sandstone caves in the western Waikato. His first published papers were on quaternary sciences and speleology.

At Cambridge on 7 March 1992 he married Gillian Crowcroft, also of Hamilton, with a BSc and MSc (Hons) in earth sciences. Her thesis was in hydrology. Both began their careers in Wellington, Peter in 1990 as threatened plants scientist with the Department of Conservation, and Gillian in 1993 with the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences. Later that year they moved to Mt Albert, Auckland, where Theo was born in 2002 and Finn in 2004. Gillian is now employed by the Auckland Council. Particularly interested in the island floras, Peter has undertaken surveys of Norfolk Island, Rarotonga, the Chathams and many small offshore islands of northern New Zealand, becoming also an assiduous bryophyte collector. His work at home includes writing research papers and dealing with plant management issues.

Author and co-author of 18 books (including *Threatened Plants of New Zealand*, 2010) and over 140 peer reviewed publications, Peter has also assisted other authors and publishers with editing of their manuscripts. He became a member of the

Auckland, Wellington and New Zealand Botanical Societies as a teenager, and from 1994 to 1995 was president of the Waikato Botanical Society, which he helped to establish. In 2003 he was elected a fellow of the Linnean Society of London. He received the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network's inaugural Individual Award (2005) and later (2008) honorary membership of that society. He was also a recipient of the New Zealand Botanical Society's Mere Award in 2006. *Piper excelsum* subsp. *delangei*, a plant he recognised as different in 1991 when he found it growing with *Piper melchior* on South West Island in the Three Kings group, was described in 1997 as *Macropiper excelsum* subsp. *peltatum* f. *delangei* by his friend and colleague Rhys Gardner.



Piper excelsum* subsp. *delangei

Piper ('pepper') is a large genus of about 2000 species of trees, shrubs, climbers or small herbaceous plants found mainly in the tropics and subtropics. Pepper, the world's most popular spice, is obtained from *Piper nigrum*, and hot-tasting oils in roots, leaf glands or fruits are typical of the family. Endemic to the Three Kings, where it is often an important component of the shrub layer, de Lange's kawakawa or pepper tree, *Macropiper excelsum* subsp. *peltatum* f. *delangei*, was elevated to subspecies rank in 2012. It is a shrub to at least 3 metres tall, the new shoots green (without reddish colouring), the fleshy, leathery leaves aromatic and extremely peppery and the seeds dark brown with longitudinal furrows.

PHOTO: Peter de Lange