

# Rhys Owen Gardner (1949 – )

Rhys Gardner's parents lived in the Kaipara area north of Auckland, where the imposing family home, Mataia, still stands near Glorit. The family's association with the area began with John Gardner and his wife Margaret, who emigrated from Scotland in 1862. John, a butcher in Glasgow, supplied meat in Auckland before buying the Mataia block in 1870. Rhys was born in Auckland on 16 April 1949 and attended Mt Albert Grammar School, where his subjects included Latin. His interest in botany may have been inherited from his mother, an exceptional gardener, and his paternal grandmother, who received a 1906 copy of Cheeseman's *Manual of the New Zealand Flora* as a school prize. After his 6A year in 1966, Rhys studied at the University of Auckland, attaining a BSc with first-class honours in botany (1971) and PhD (1977), revising the *Alseuosmia* genus and family.

He then worked for several years as a temporary botanical ecologist and taxonomist for the former Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) Botany Division at Mt Albert, Auckland, followed by a stint of melon growing at Mangere, before becoming consulting botanist for Bio-researchers Ltd. His free-lance work included working as an ethnobotanist in Fiji and New Guinea, and in 1980, with fellow botanist Ewen Cameron, producing a vegetation map of Great Barrier Island for the Department of Lands and Survey. From 1979 a volunteer at the Auckland Museum herbarium, he was recognised formally as an honorary research associate in 1990.

Coerced into joining the Auckland Botanical Society in 1979, he contributed to it in many ways: writing

articles, leading field trips, giving lectures and assisting with difficult plant identifications. He was made an honorary life member in 2005.

His spare-time projects included working on the *Geranium solanderi* complex, sorting out *Gahnia* on Lord Howe Island, and revising New Zealand species of *Macropiper* (now *Piper*). The Gardner herbarium numbers around 11,000 specimens collected from New Zealand and the Pacific, and from them he has described several new to science. He is a prolific writer, and in addition to his numerous Auckland Botanical Society articles, many taxonomic papers have been published in a variety of journals. These reflect not only his enquiring scientific mind, but also his great command of English and, at times, cryptic wit. He taught himself to draw during the 1990s, and his recent publications are often supported by illustrations.

A smut fungus and three plants have been named after Rhys Gardner. He discovered the smut in 1989 while examining plants of the giant umbrella sedge *Cyperus ustulatus* at Western Springs, and sent specimens to mycology experts for identification. It was subsequently named *Ustilago gardneri* in his honour. *Elaeocarpus gardneri* is a New Guinea relative of our hīnau and pōkaka, and *Geranium gardneri*, which was not collected in New Zealand until the mid-nineteenth century, is now accepted as indigenous to Australia and naturalised in Norfolk Island and New Zealand. *Olearia gardneri*, one of our most threatened trees and now largely confined to the Taihape area, was named in 1998 in recognition of his work distinguishing it from the larger South Island *Olearia hectorii*.



## *Olearia gardneri*

*Olearia gardneri*, a rare small-leaved tree daisy, is a deciduous shrub or small tree growing up to 7 metres tall, with furrowed fawn bark on the trunk and older branches. Young branches show two distinct ridges in cross-section, and have dark reddish brown smooth bark. Thin, light green elliptical leaves are borne in clusters of usually opposite pairs, and the flowers, usually in clusters of one to six, occur from October to December, at the same time or after the appearance of the leaves. Endemic to the North Island, it occurs in the Rangitikei region and in eastern Wairarapa hill country, preferring high fertility slips, flood-prone and damp valley floors, toe slopes of hill country and gaps or margins of alluvial forest.