

# Eric John Godley (1919 – 2010)

Eric John Godley, the son of Rubert John Godley and his wife Louise Emilie (née Barrell), was born on 10 May 1919 at Devonport, Auckland, and his sisters Hilda and Ruth in 1922 and 1926. His parents, both from England, had met in Auckland, and Bert, as his father was always called, was training to be a surveyor before post-war shell shock ended his career. Eric attended primary school at Devonport. His interest in native plants, which began with his activities as a Boy Scout, developed into a serious interest in botany during his fifth form year (1935) at Takapuna Grammar, where he studied botany and chemistry for matriculation, and the following year for University Bursary and Scholarship. After qualifying as a teacher at Auckland Teachers' Training College, he completed his BSc (1941) and MSc (1942) degrees at Auckland University, and was awarded the Duffus Lubecki Research Scholarship.

Service in the Second World War, as lieutenant in a New Zealand anti-aircraft unit 1942–43, and bombardier with the 7th Anti-Tank Regiment in Italy 1943–45, intervened. He then continued his studies at Cambridge University, gaining his PhD in 1948, and after his return to New Zealand lectured in genetics at Auckland University until 1950. In 1951 he joined the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, and from 1958–1981 he was director of the Botany Division. Under his leadership, the division expanded its research and extension programmes and became New Zealand's principal centre for research on native and naturalised plants. He stepped down voluntarily in 1981, but as a Landcare research associate, continued to make a significant contribution to botany in New Zealand.

Books played a major part in Eric Godley's life – not only those that bear his name as author (*A Botanist's Notebook*) or editor (*New Zealand Plants* by Laing and Blackwell, and Cockayne's *New Zealand Plants and their Story*), but also thirty or so others produced under his direction or with his encouragement and support. He was the first president of the New Zealand Botanical Society in 1988, and after 1990 researched, wrote and contributed to its journal a series of over seventy biographical notes of people associated with New Zealand botany. He also published many research papers based on his own work with native plants such as the kōwhai and the native tree fuchsia, and articles for gardeners. His many awards and honours include the kōwhai *Sophora godleyi* named after him, the Loder Cup and Hutton Memorial Medal, presentation of the Cheeseman and Leonard

Cockayne Memorial Lectures, fellowship of prestigious scientific societies, and in 1990 an OBE.



***Sophora godleyi***

The name of the genus *Sophora* is from the Arabic *sufayra*, the name of a leguminous tree with pea-like flowers. The genus of about 50 species includes herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees scattered worldwide. Eight species are endemic to New Zealand. *Sophora godleyi*, or papa kōwhai, a tree up to 20 metres tall, is restricted to the central North Island, where it is particularly abundant in the catchments of major south-draining rivers, usually on calcareous limestone, mudstone, siltstone or sandstone (papa). Leaflets of *Sophora godleyi* are ovate to more or less orbicular, and the tiny hairs are usually curly, curved or twisted. Blooming in late spring, its racemes of up to seven flowers are bright yellow.

In 1955 Dr Eric John Godley married June Vivian Midgley, daughter of Johnson Holwill Midgley. There were no children from the marriage. In his university days he was a keen sportsman, participating in cricket, rugby and athletics, and in his middle years an enthusiastic gardener and horticulturist at his Banks Peninsula home. In later life, at a Christchurch retirement village, he enjoyed walking, reading and watching rugby – when not doing further research and writing on his favourite subject, botany! His wife June died on 16 July 2007, and three years later on 27 June 2010, Eric Godley died, aged 91.