

Bruce Gordon Hamlin (1929 – 1976)

Bruce Hamlin was born on 15 November 1929 in Miramar, Wellington, the sixth and youngest child of Laurence Charles Hamlin and his Australian wife Dorothy, née Paul. His father worked on his parents' farm at Johnsonville before serving at Gallipoli and the Somme during World War I. Invalided home after severe shrapnel injuries, and suffering ongoing physical and emotional problems, he was employed for a time at Tramways. His wife died when Bruce was just two years old. A series of housekeepers, a second marriage (to Grace Harris) and the birth of four more children ensued, but the family stayed together. Bruce attended Miramar South School and Wellington Technical College, where his English language skills and acting talent came to the fore. At the age of 16 he joined the botany division of the DSIR and worked as an assistant to the well-known authority on grasses and allied plants, Victor Zotov. While attending classes at Victoria University College during the early 1950s, Bruce was noted for his tramping club activities and masterly drama club performances. In 1954 he joined the staff of the Dominion Museum as a junior scientist in the botany department. Becoming interested in printing and publishing, he took over editorship of its scientific journal *Records of the Dominion Museum* for about ten years, and took the bold step of changing its format. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he had a weekly quarter-hour *Nature Question Time* on the 2YA children's session, and in 1962–63 he often appeared on TV's *Junior Magazine* with Kate and Peter Harcourt, to talk about natural history items, coins and other curiosities. By the late 1960s he was the museum's curator of botany, and during the Cook Bicentenary Exhibition in 1969–70 he was an invaluable font of knowledge on all aspects of the *Endeavour* voyage. In the fifties and sixties his botanical work focused on the taxonomy of the New Zealand sedges, and he also wrote and illustrated the popular small books *Native Trees* (1962) and *Native Ferns* (1963). Later he switched his attention to the liverworts, or hepatics, as they were sometimes called. Also interested in the botanical history of New Zealand, he documented the fieldwork of early botanists such as Petrie, Kirk and Cockayne. His manuscript of the journeys of missionary William Colenso through the North Island was almost ready for publication at the time of his death. Later taken up and expanded by Ian St George, it was published as *Colenso's Collections* by the New Zealand Native Orchid Group in 2009. Hamlin's fieldwork included trips to the Chatham Islands, Stewart Island and Australia, and in 1963 he represented the museum at the golden jubilee of Kirstenbosch, the national botanical gardens of South Africa.

Bruce Hamlin loved music, and was interested in the construction and usage of the English language and the meaning of Latin and Greek scientific names. Fascinated also by coins, tokens and medals, he was made a fellow of the Royal Numismatic Society of New Zealand in 1967 for his work during the museum's exhibition marking the changeover to decimal currency. A stalwart member of the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand, he was elected a fellow of the association in 1968 and was its president at the time of his sudden death in Karori on 22 March 1976, aged 46.

In 2015, when it was recommended that around seventy species of *Uncinia* (commonly known as "hook grass") be included in the large cosmopolitan genus *Carex*, a new name was required for *Uncinia astonii*, which had been first described by Hamlin in 1959. It was renamed *Carex hamlinii* "to recognise Bruce G Hamlin (1929–1976) and his important contribution to the flora of New Zealand".



Beech forest study, Ruahine Range, 2006

Carex hamlinii

Carex is a vast, almost worldwide genus of around 2,000 species of grassy plants, commonly known as sedges. *Carex hamlinii* (syn. *Uncinia astonii*) is a fine-leaved, dark green, densely growing hook grass with a slender habit. A New Zealand endemic, it is usually associated with the understorey of beech forest in the southern Ruahine and Tararua Ranges in the North Island, and Nelson, Westland, Otago and Fiordland in the South Island.