

Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744 – 1811)

Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos was born into a family of minor nobility in Gijón in Asturias, Spain, on 5 January 1744. It was customary for large families to have a son or daughter become a friar or nun, and Gaspar, intended for the church, received preliminary training at Aviedo, Ávila, and later Alcalá, where he spent two years continuing his study of canon law. However, his uncle, the Duke of Losada, advised him to practise law as a layman. At twenty years of age he received the tonsure, the ritual shaving of the head for the priesthood, before becoming a judge in the criminal court of Seville in 1767. His ability and integrity came to the notice of Carlos III, and in 1778 he was transferred to the courts in Madrid.



Parahebe jovellanoides

Parahebe jovellanoides is a creeping herb spreading and rooting freely at the nodes, the stems up to 2 metres long but only to 50 mm tall. With its dull green, spatulate, hairy, usually toothed leaves appearing through litter on the forest floor, it could be mistaken for *Jovellana* when not in flower. Flowers, which are rather large (10–12 mm diameter) in relation to the rest of the plant, have broad white corolla lobes, a magenta ring outside the throat and very short nectar guides, and in the wild are sparingly produced between October and December. Known only from a small mixed podocarp forest remnant at Riverhead, near Auckland, it is vulnerable to invasive weeds and trampling. It is hoped that nursery-grown plants distributed to gardeners will help its survival.

At both Seville and the capital, Jovellanos integrated official duties with his love of study and writing, especially relating to the development of industry and agriculture, economy, art and philosophy, based on the ideas of the Enlightenment. He tried to improve the lot of the working man and was enthusiastic about the proposed scientific expedition by Alejandro Malaspina. Jovellanos became a prominent member of the scientific and literary societies, and an adviser to the king. But Carlos III died in 1788 and the reactionary administration of Carlos IV put a stop to Enlightenment reforms. Those who had taken an active part were persecuted, and Jovellanos was implicated in the falling from grace of his friend, financier Francisco de Cabarrús. He spent the years 1790–1797 in virtual exile at Gijón, writing and establishing the Asturian *Instituite*.

He was summoned back to public life in 1797 and accepted the post of minister of justice under Godoy, but disliking Godoy's policy and conduct he conspired to procure his dismissal. With the return to power of Godoy in 1798 Jovellanos was again banished to Gijón. In 1801 he was imprisoned in Castillo de Belver (Mallorca) and his projects came to a halt until 1808, when he was freed by order of Prince Ferdinand. He accepted a place on the *Junta Central* as the representative of Asturias, but soon had to flee again before the advance of the French. Developing pneumonia on board a vessel bound for his native province, he died at Puerto de Vega on the border of Asturias on 27 November 1811.

During his confinement Jovellanos had written of his interest in botany, his love of trees and the pride he felt that a small flower had been given his family name. On a ten-year expedition (1777–1788) in Peru and Chile, Spanish botanists Hipólita Ruiz López and José Antonio Pavón collected about 3000 plant species, 500 of them previously unknown, and made 2400 botanical drawings. When Jovellanos became minister in 1798 and found that publication of their work was on hold, he authorised the payment of over 1,000 reales for the four volumes of *Flora Peruviana et Chilensis* (1798–1802). In it, the new genus *Jovellana* was “dedicated in honour of the celebrated Gaspar Melchior de Jovellanos, supporter of this publication.” Currently, four species are recognised: two in southern Chile and two, *Jovellana sinclairii* and *Jovellana repens*, in New Zealand. A mysterious plant first collected near Auckland in 2007 was given an identity in 2009: *Veronica jovellanoides* ('resembling *Jovellana*'). The following year it was transferred to *Parahebe*.