

Aylmer Bourke Lambert (1761 – 1842)

The only son of Edmund Lambert of Boyton House near Heytesbury, in Wiltshire, England, Aylmer Bourke Lambert was born at Bath on 2 February 1761. His mother, Bridget Bourke, was the daughter of an Irish viscount. Aylmer collected plants at Boyton before entering a local school for the sons of country gentlemen. When his mother died in 1773 he inherited estates in Ireland and in Jamaica; these and a later paternal inheritance enabled him to be financially independent and devote his life to the study of natural history. Both his father and his stepmother, the daughter of well-known botanist Henry Seymer, encouraged him, and he spent many holidays with the Seymer family at Hanford House, Dorset. He studied at Hackney School, London, from 1773 and attended Oxford University for three years from January 1779. After leaving Oxford he married and lived in London and Salisbury, making one trip to Ireland to visit the family estates.

At Oxford he met the botanists Daniel Lysons and John Sibthorp, and he later became acquainted with Joseph Banks and James Edward Smith. His zeal for collecting plants, the extensive development of his gardens, the acquisition of books for his impressive library and his writings led in 1788 to Smith inviting him to become a fellow of the newly established Linnean Society. In 1796 he was appointed one of the society's four vice-presidents, an office he held until his death. He joined the Society of Antiquaries in 1791 and was also elected a fellow of the Royal Society, becoming a member of the council in 1810. A generous and congenial colleague, he made his library and large herbarium available to botanists from many countries. He also encouraged two of his near relatives to study natural history: Etheldred Benett became a well-known fossil collector and geologist, and her sister Anna Maria studied botany at a time when sexual discrimination against female scientists was the norm.

In 1797 Lambert published *A Description of the Genus Cinchona*, illustrated by Ferdinand Bauer from specimens in the Banksian herbarium; a supplementary volume, *An Illustration of the Genus Cinchona*, appeared in 1821. *A Description of the Genus Pinus*, his major work, also illustrated by Bauer, was published in two volumes in 1803 and 1824, under the guidance of Joseph Banks and James Edward Smith. Lambert also contributed to *A Botanist's Guide Through England and Wales* (1805) by Dawson Turner and Lewis W Dillway, and *English Botany* (1790-1814) by Sowerby and Smith.

Two plant genera are named after him: *Lambertia*, an Australian shrub commonly known as "mountain devil" for its distinctive seed capsules, was named by James Smith in honour of his friend, and *Aylmeria* in the family Caryophyllaceae is a small genus of Australian flowering annuals. The botanical explorer David Douglas, who discovered western North America's sugar pine in 1826, named it *Pinus lambertiana* in acknowledgement of Lambert's expertise on pines. In New Zealand, Lambert's name is remembered in the name of the sedge *Carex lambertiana*, described in 1853 by Francis Boott, an American physician and botanical expert on the genus *Carex*, who lived in England permanently from 1820 until his death in 1863.



Carex lambertiana

Carex (Latin *carex*, from Greek *keirein* 'to cut') is a large genus of leafy sedges often known as cutty grasses. Plants have unisexual flowers and the nut enclosed in a utricle. The genus is widespread, with perhaps 2000 species in temperate and cold regions. Of about 80 native and 22 naturalised species in New Zealand, 56 are found in wetlands. *Carex lambertiana* forms robust tufted plants of bright green or yellow green leaves, double-folded, 60–100 cm tall. Endemic, it occurs in lowland swamps, scrub and forest almost throughout the North Island, and in the South Island from Nelson to Canterbury.