

Ignacio Maria Ruiz de Luzuriaga (1763 – 1822)

Ignacio Maria Ruiz de Luzuriaga was born in 1763 in Villaro, a town and municipality in the Basque Country of northern Spain. His father, Jose Santiago Ruiz de Luzuriaga, was an "enlightened" physician and advocate of smallpox inoculation, and in 1770 began practising on a son of his friend, the Count of Peñaflores, and his own two sons. The Count was a founding member of the Royal Society of Friends of the Country, which sought to bring new ideas in science and culture to the Basque region, and established in 1776 the Patriotic Seminary of Vergara (Bergara), a boarding institution with an emphasis on commerce and the sciences, rather than philosophy and theology.

From an early age Ignacio showed an aptitude for learning. He was educated under the supervision of his father, and as well as Greek and Latin, studied English, French and Italian. In 1777, when fifteen years old, he entered the new Vergara seminary, where he studied humanities, mathematics, physics and chemistry. As part of his schoolwork he translated a speech on naval hygiene, mainly with reference to Captain Cook's second voyage, which was read by John Pringle to the Royal Society of London in 1776. However, his father, dissatisfied with the subjects available at the seminary, sent Ignacio abroad to complete his training.

Luzuriaga spent four years (1780-1784) in Paris and studied with scientific celebrities such as naturalist Laurent de Jussieu. By the time he had completed his medical studies he had published his first scientific paper, on the decomposition of atmospheric air by lead. On the recommendation of the Count of Aranda, the ambassador of Spain in Paris, he was granted a scholarship, which he used for new books and post-graduate study in Britain. He spent 1785 to 1786 in Edinburgh earning his Bachelor of Arts degree and doctorate in medicine, with a thesis on respiration and the circulation of blood. He also looked at industries related to chemistry and medicines there and in Glasgow. In London for several months, he attended some of John Hunter's physiology and surgery courses and visited hospitals, and back in Paris gained further experience at the Montpellier faculty of medicine.

Returning to Spain, he stayed briefly with his father in Bilbao, and then settled in Madrid, retaining his medical degree with the mandatory two years of practice. As the unsettled political climate made scientific research difficult, he focussed on issues of hygiene and public health, including desalination of sea water, lead and copper poisoning from pots and other containers, health in prisons, maternity and founding welfare, assistance to the deaf and in

1801 the introduction of smallpox vaccination. He was a member of a number of medical academies and societies in Spain and abroad, and was on the committee that drafted a public health law sent to Parliament in 1821, six months before his death in Madrid in 1822.

The plant genus *Luzuriaga* was named in his honour in 1802 by the Spanish botanists Ruiz and Pavón. It comprises three species from southern South America and a single species in New Zealand. *Luzuriaga parviflora* was described and illustrated (as *Callixene parviflora*) in J D Hooker's *Icones Plantarum* in 1844, from a collection made by William Colenso in December 1841 "at the foot of large trees in the beech forest, on the ascent of the mountains from Lake Waikare". Hooker believed it was first discovered by either Forster or Menzies, but not recorded in any early publications.



Luzuriaga parviflora

Luzuriaga parviflora ('small-flowered') is a branching, wiry little plant that weaves through damp mossy places on the forest floor, from the Coromandel Range south to Stewart Island, where it reaches sea level. The oblong, pointed leaves, each with a twist in its petiole, are widely spaced alternately along the short stems. White chalice-shaped flowers appear singly from December to March and are followed by globose pointed white berries, giving rise to its common name lantern berry, and Māori names pūwatawata ('gleaming') and nohi ('eyes').