

Brian Peter John Molloy (1930 –)

Orphaned at an early age, Brian Molloy developed an independence and strength of character that helped him pursue a career doing what he loved – working with native plants. He was born in Wellington and brought up in Waikanae and at Palmerston North, where he received his secondary education at Marist Brothers High School, followed by a Diploma in Agriculture at Massey College in 1950. With little chance of getting onto a farm in the post-war years, teaching agriculture seemed a reasonable alternative, and he took his Diploma in Teaching at Christchurch Teachers College. A few sessions with large classes of children changed his mind, and he continued with his own studies, graduating MSc (Hons) in botany at Canterbury University (1960), and PhD in plant science at Lincoln College (1966).



Corybas cryptanthus

Corybas cryptanthus ('hidden flower'), known for over ten years as *Molloybas cryptanthus*, is a curious leafless orchid lacking chlorophyll. It is usually found growing with mosses, almost entirely beneath mānuka or beech litter on the forest floor. The flower is almost colourless, but may be flecked with red or brown; the petals and sepals are long, and often emerge above the surface of the leaf litter; the labellum is wide and deeply fringed. It flowers from July to September and the elongated seed stems (up to 15 cm) appear above the ground in November. Known since the 1880s, but rarely seen, it was not described until its rediscovery near Warkworth in 1949.

The years 1956-1958 were noteworthy also for his sporting achievements – he played rugby in the New Zealand Universities team that beat the Springboks, and was a member of the All Blacks team that toured Australia. His marriage to Barbara Anita O'Neill in 1957 was to give them three daughters and a son.

Until 1969 a research officer with the Department of Agriculture, working on tussock grassland, weeds and pasture ecology, he then moved to the Botany Division of DSIR (now Landcare Research) and specialised in plant taxonomy, nature conservation and soil and vegetation history until his retirement in 1995. He was also to the forefront of many conservation organisations, and instrumental in the acquisition of new protected areas and extensions to existing parks and reserves.

Although considering himself a general botanist, Brian Molloy has done extensive work and is a recognised authority on New Zealand orchids, conifers and some of the daisies. He has written over 100 scientific papers, most of them on botanical subjects. In 1983 Johns and Molloy's book *Native Orchids of New Zealand* and his own *Ferns in Peel Forest*, both with text aimed at non-specialists, were published. *Riccarton Bush: Putaringamotu*, with contributions from acknowledged experts, was edited by Brian Molloy and released in 1995.

In 1990 Brian Molloy was awarded the Loder Cup for his contribution to conservation and the study of native plants, and in 1992 received the Community Service Award. A new kōwhai species, *Sophora molloyi*, "as tough as old boots and like its namesake Brian Molloy, hardy in all extremes of weather", was named in his honour in 2001. The next year a new saprophytic orchid genus was named *Molloybas* in "well-deserved recognition of the man who contributed so much to New Zealand orchids", but its single species was later returned to *Corybas*, from whence it came. In 2011 he was awarded the New Zealand Native Orchid Group's Hatch Medal and was made a Companion of the Royal Society of New Zealand. Other recent honours include the New Zealand Plant Conservation Network Lifetime Achievement Award (2006), the establishment of Brian Molloy QEII National Trust Scholarship to support PhD research in New Zealand ecology (2012), and the New Zealand Botanical Society's Allan Mere Award (2014).

Although retired, Brian Molloy continues to work as a botanical and conservation consultant and as a research associate with Landcare Research.