

# Jules-Émile Planchon (1823 –1888)

Jules-Émile Planchon, the son of David Planchon and his wife Marie Coularou, was born on 21 March 1823 in Ganges, a small town at the foot of the Cevennes Mountains in southern France. His brother Gustave was born ten years later. An artisan of modest means, with an interest in natural history, David Planchon ensured that his sons received a good general education. Émile imbibed his father's interest, and at the age of sixteen began pharmacy studies at Montpellier University. After gaining bachelor degrees in 1841 and 1842, he graduated Doctor of Sciences in 1844, with a thesis in botany. He was 21 years old.

From 1844 to 1848 he was herbarium curator for William Hooker at Kew Gardens, England. His work there was acknowledged by George Bentham in the preface to *Flora Australiensis*, and Planchon in turn benefitted from contact with eminent botanists such as Robert Brown. Life was difficult when he returned to France in 1848, and he regularly visited the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, becoming friendly with Belgian-born Joseph Descaigne; through him Planchon obtained a teaching position at Louis van Houtte's Institute of Horticulture in Ghent. During his time there he was also principal editor of the journal *Flore des serres et des Jardins de l'Europe*.

After completing his medical degree at Montpellier in 1851, he was appointed professor of botany and

director of the botanical garden at Nancy. Two years later he returned to Montpellier University to head the department of botanical sciences, and on completion of his pharmacy studies in 1856 he became professor and then director of the school of pharmacy. On 14 April that year he married Henriette Lichtenstein, a younger sister of his colleague, entomologist Jules Lichtenstein, at Montpellier. Their son Louis was born in 1858. In 1881 Planchon was appointed to replace the retiring professor of natural history in the faculty of medicine, a position that included management of the botanical garden. He died suddenly in office on 1 April 1888.

In a tiny park opposite the railway station in Montpellier a bust commemorates his major role in the discovery in 1868 of the phylloxera mite that was destroying grapevines globally, and the subsequent introduction of resistant North American species to use as rootstock for grafting, which saved the French wine industry. He collaborated in publications on various floras and described and named many plants, including in 1847 *Actinidia chinensis*, the original kiwifruit sent as herbarium specimens from China by British plant hunter Robert Fortune. *Planchonella*, a genus of tropical trees, with one representative (tawāpou) in New Zealand, was established by Jean Baptiste Louis Pierre in 1890.



## ***Planchonella costata***

*Planchonella*, a genus of around 100 mainly tropical species of flowering trees, is sometimes included in the larger genus *Pouteria*. *Planchonella costata* (Latin *costa*: 'ribbed', referring to the leaves) is a coastal tree indigenous to Norfolk Island and New Zealand, where it is found in coastal forest from Te Pahi south to East Cape and Kawhia. It grows 6–8 metres tall with a spreading open habit and glossy foliage. The fruit, orange to purple-black as they ripen, contain sticky, milk-like flesh surrounding 1–4 hard, curved, polished seeds, and are relished by kereru and kaka. Māori used the seeds as necklaces and some southern occurrences of tawāpou associated with pa sites may have been planted.