

# Daniel Solander (1733 – 1782)

**D**aniel Solander, son of Carl Solander and his wife Magdalena Bostadia, was born in Piteå, northern Sweden, on 19 February 1733. Although baptised Daniel, he later adopted his father's name with the suffix 'son' as an extra Christian name. His paternal grandfather had gone to Piteå as vicar in 1715, and his father Carl was deputy-rector of the town's school, where young Daniel's interest in natural history was nurtured. Family libraries were also sources of learning, stimulated by contact with visiting scientists. Botanist Carl Linnaeus enjoyed Solander hospitality during his famous Lapland travels of 1732, and when Daniel went to Uppsala University in 1749 to study medicine, he was "cherished as a son" by Linnaeus, and urged to study botany. Linnaeus, then supervisor of medical botany at Uppsala, was a highly regarded teacher, whose system of plant classification is still in use. When asked to send one of his pupils to England to foster the study of natural history there, he chose his most brilliant student, Solander.

After long shipping delays, Daniel Solander arrived in London on 29 June 1760. He was appointed to a specialist position on the staff of the British Museum, and in June 1764 was elected a fellow of the Royal Society. Then, deeply hurt when he heard that his beloved Lisa Stina, the eldest daughter of Linnaeus, had married a considerably older man, he curtailed his letters to Linnaeus and never returned to Sweden. Short, rotund and genial, he was generally well liked, and as the most able botanist in England at the time, was a natural choice when Joseph Banks sought a companion and assistant for Cook's first voyage.

The *Endeavour* sailed from England in August 1768, and during nearly three years away, Banks and Solander took every opportunity to go ashore. Although unable to penetrate much further than two to three miles from the New Zealand coast, they collected more than 350 plant specimens from a range of habitats in Queen Charlotte Sound, Poverty Bay, Tolaga Bay, Mercury Bay and Bay of Islands. On board, these were painstakingly sorted, described, drawn and preserved for the long journey back to England. After the voyage, Solander continued working for Banks as his librarian and secretary, as well as sorting and classifying their collection of plants for publication. Unfortunately, before the work was completed, he suffered a cerebral haemorrhage and died in London on 13 May 1782. He was only 49 years old.

Captain Cook honoured Solander by naming an offshore island (Hautere) after him. However, Daniel Solander's place at the forefront of botanical exploration in New Zealand is probably better remembered through the plants that carry his name: *Carmichaelia solandri* (broom), *Fuscospora solandri* (black beech), *Olearia solandri* (coastal tree daisy), *Rhabdothamnus solandri* (native gloxinia) and *Astelia solandri* (perching lily).



## ***Astelia solandri***

The *Astelia* genus (Greek *a* 'without'; *stela* 'pillar', meaning 'without a stem or trunk') has about 25 species around the Pacific but centred in New Zealand, which has 13. Seven of these reach the alpine zone, the others, including *Astelia solandri*, are a feature of our native forest. *Astelia solandri* is a common epiphyte with long narrow silvery-green drooping leaves, and can grow into a very large clump on its host tree or, if the drainage is good, on the ground. Like all *astelia*, it has separate male and female plants. Drooping branched flowering stems of the male plant bear maroon flowers laden with yellow pollen, while those of the female are light yellow or pinkish and followed in the autumn by yellow-green translucent berries that were sometimes used by Māori as food. The Māori name for the plant, *kōwharawhara* (*ko* 'a yonder place'; *whara* 'hit, be struck or be injured'), perhaps complements the early European bushmen's name "widow-maker", so-called because of the ever-present danger of one falling unexpectedly from above.