

Göran Wahlenberg (1780 – 1851)

Göran Wahlenberg (also known as Georg) was born on 1 October 1780 at Skarphyttans in the Kroppa parish, Värmland, in Southwest Sweden, the son of utility manager Alex Göran Andersson Wahlenberg. He entered Uppsala University as a student in 1792 when he was twelve years old, and received his doctorate in medicine in 1806. By then he had already visited the Pommern coast of the South Baltic Sea and made frequent trips to northernmost Scandinavia to study the alpine flora. In 1804 and 1808 he published accounts of these trips. *Flora Lapponica* (1812), his most important book, was an extension of the similarly named work by his compatriot Carl von Linné. The pioneering aspect of Wahlenberg's work was his account of the vegetation zones in the book's introduction.

In 1813 he explored the Central Carpathian Mountains of Eastern Europe, and was among the first scholars to study the plants and geography of the High Tatras in the Habsburg Monarchy. His work on the relationships between vegetation types, climate, topography and geological features of the region was a forerunner of ecological plant geography, and was contemporary with but independent of that of the recognised international pioneer in this field, Alexander von Humboldt. Two of the highest mountain lakes in the Tatras, now in Slovakia, are named in honour of the Swedish naturalist.

He was appointed botanical demonstrator at Uppsala University in 1814 and professor of medicine and botany in 1829, succeeding Carl Peter Thunberg. The following year he was awarded the Academy of Sciences Linnaeus gold medal. He then became less active in botanical research. With his duties requiring him to lecture in pharmacology and physiology as well as botany, he felt obliged to study the few available homoeopathy texts, to better qualify himself for his work. He became a convert, and although he never practised it himself, he maintained its principles in his lectures and is credited with the introduction of homoeopathy into Sweden.

After enjoying good health throughout his life, he developed gangrene in a heel and died at Uppsala on 22 March 1851, at the age of 70. He was unmarried. He had been a member of the Academy of Sciences since 1808 and was also a member of other learned societies. He was highly regarded within and outside the country for his diligence and rigorous research, but his taciturn and rather harsh temperament impeded the effectiveness of his teaching. Time, however, has upheld many of his visionary ideas.

In the Norwegian Arctic, Wahlenbergfjord, sometimes known in English as Waalenburg Bay, and the glacier of Wahlenbergbreen, are named in honour of Göran Wahlenberg. The southern harebell genus *Wahlenbergia*, proposed by German botanist Heinrich Schrader and described by Albrecht Roth in 1821, and several plant species, are also named for him.



Wahlenbergia albomarginata subsp. *laxa*

Wahlenbergia is a genus of more than 100 widely dispersed species of harebells, the southern counterpart of the northern genus *Campanula*. *Wahlenbergia* occurs mainly in South America, New Zealand and Australia. A 1997 revision recognised ten New Zealand species and several subspecies. *Wahlenbergia albomarginata* ('white-margined' – referring to the leaves) is a variable herb with branched, wiry underground stems that produce usually scattered rosettes of leathery, spoon-shaped leaves with a white margin. Between November and February each rosette sends up a single slender stem 3–20 cm tall which bears a white or pale blue flower, often with deeper coloured veins. In bloom, it is one of the most noticeable small plants in lowland to low alpine tussock grassland and herbfields of South and Stewart Islands. *Wahlenbergia albomarginata* subsp. *laxa* has toothed leaves without white margins, and relatively large, long-tubed flowers. It occurs in high-rainfall, western regions