

Philip Evgen Karel Zois (1756 – 1799)

Karel (Karl) Zois was born on 18 November 1756 in Ljubljana, the capital of the Carniola region, then under Habsburg rule, and from 1804–1918 part of the Austrian empire. Today it is the metropolis of independent Slovenia. Karel's father Michaelangelo Zois was of Swiss-Italian descent, and early in life had moved to Ljubljana where he became a wealthy merchant and landlord. His mother, a noblewoman from a well-known ironworking family, was Michaelangelo's second wife. Karel was the fifth of their known eight children. Like his brothers, he would have been educated at the student city of Graz (Gradzu), the second-largest city in Austria, and politically and culturally more important to Slovenes than Ljubljana.



Zoysia minima

Zoysia is a genus of rhizomatous grasses, with nine species found in southeast and eastern Asia and Australasia. Some species have been introduced elsewhere for drought-resistant, non-mow lawns and golf courses. *Zoysia minima* ('smallest'), commonly known as prickly couch or zoysia, is a short native grass with smooth, folded leaves with prickly tips. It forms compact turfs in exposed places, and cushions up to 15 cm tall when sheltered, on sand dunes, sandy ground and gravel from sea level to 600 m. Often the dominant plant in the scattered Taranaki coastal turfs, it sometimes defines the boundary between herbfield and pasture. *Zoysia* also features on low fertility Nelson sites and in turf on granite at Charleston, North Westland.

Described as a country gentleman, Karel Zois devoted his life to botany, and after the death of his father in 1777 was supported by his more famous elder brother Sigmund (Ziga) Zois, a natural scientist and patron of the arts, who inherited their father's noble title and mother's large estates, mines and ironworks. Karel lived mainly at the castle Brdo near Kranj, where he grew alpine plants as well as endemic and exotic trees and shrubs for scientific study. It was the first botanical garden in Slovenia and in 2008 the estate was declared a cultural monument of national importance. He also spent some time at Javornik near Jecenice. He was one of the first to study the region's alpine flora, especially in the Julian and Kamnik Alps and Karavanke Mountains, where he collected around 2100 herbarium specimens, some of them new to science. Although his work was not published, some of his handwritten notes, draft letters and herbarium specimens are now in the Natural History Museum of Slovenia.

Together with his brother, he collected the Slovenian names of plants, and like him, he sent dried as well as live plants to botanist friends in Klagenfurt and Vienna. Two species, *Viola zoysia* and *Campanula zoysia* are named after him. "The most beautiful child of our mountains," said Klagenfurt Jesuit and natural historian Franz Xaver von Wulfen in 1785 when he saw the bright yellow violet sent to him by Karel Zois. With it were the words, "Still alive, with the ground from the Slovenian Alps." Wulfen named the violet after its discoverer and added a hand-painted drawing to his description. In 1788, describing an attractive bellflower sent to him, Wulfen wrote, "I owe the first knowledge of this extremely rare plant to an illustrious gentleman, the noble Karel Zois, who devotes himself entirely to botany, which consumes all his attention, energy and time, and certainly a great deal of money." In 1994 a Slovenian stamp was issued depicting the Zois bellflower (*Campanula zoysia*).

Karel von Zois, Baron Edelstein, died in Trieste, Italy, following a stroke, on 29 October 1799, in his 43rd year. *Zoysia*, a genus of creeping grasses, was named after him by the German phytogeographer and taxonomist Karl Ludwig Willdenow in 1801.