

NAME TALES – WITH REFERENCE TO SOPHORA

Jan Chaffey

So many of our native plants have three names. The Latin, the Maori, and a common or local one. Tri-cultural one could say. With 45 -50 spp world wide, 8 of them in New Zealand and 70 odd young Kowhai trees planted in my new garden at Taitapu, I have become curious as to the name associations and whether or not there has ever been a common name. It proved to be illusive. After much enquiry I learnt nothing, until one day there it was at last, New Zealand Liburnum, in Laing and Blackwell "Plants of New Zealand" a book still on my shelf.

The Latin name *Sophora* is taken from the Arabic, Sophero, meaning 'pea flowered'. The sub-family is Papilionoideae (butterfly-flowered). Of course Kowhai can have a glorious yellow butterfly look. The Maori name kowhai has the meaning yellow. Do you wonder? It is also considered to be the national flower of New Zealand. Linnaeus (also known as Carl von Linne) changed its name to *Sophora*.

This plant had been collected in New Zealand by Banks and Solander on Cook's first voyage 1769-1770. Its original name was *Edwardsia*. So who was Edwards, this man so honored?

Sydenham Edwards (1786-1819) was born in Wales. He could draw brilliantly at a very young age, and because of this great skill became a foremost illustrator of natural history. He produced 1,700 watercolors for the Botanical Magazine alone. He was a Fellow of the Linnaean Society of London.

The Chilean species was named *E. macnabiana*. William Macnab (1780-1848) became curator at the Royal Edinburgh Botanic Gardens. He had been a gardener at Kew when Sir Joseph Banks recommended him to this position. There is a lovely story attached to his life. The Tsar of Russia was so grateful to him for his assistance in acquiring plants for the Imperial Gardens at St Petersburg, that he sent him a diamond ring. One can not help wondering just what happened to that ring.

So we come to *Sophora davidii*. This plant was named after a French missionary to China in 19th Century, Pere Armand David C.M. who was credited amongst many things of discovering the giant panda. The beautiful dove tree *Davidia involuta* is named after him.



Sophora davidii. Photo by Tim Wood;
<http://plant-quest.blogspot.com>

I went to Yunnan in China this year and was determined to find this kowhai. I saw many rare and wonderful plants going as high as 3,900m near Zhondian close to the Tibet plateau. It wasn't till the return journey that we visited the Stone Forest near the old city of Dali; a much larger version, but reminiscent of the limestone rocks at Castle Hill. Finally there beside the track was the plant I had been looking for – a rather straggly bush that can grow to 3m. This one certainly wasn't as big, but was in flower with quite large white to green inflorescences.

CORDYLINE – A BOTANICAL WAIF

Colin Burrows

In 1998 my article in Canterbury Botanical Society Journal No.32 referred to the complicated history of *Cordyline's* family placement. Familial attributions for the cabbage tree genus between 1925 and 1998 were to: Liliaceae – Cheeseman 1925; Agavaceae – Moore & Edgar 1970; Asteliaceae – Dahlgren, Clifford & Yeo 1985; Dracaenaceae – Takhtajan 1986; Asphodelaceae – Webb, Johns & Sykes 1990; Lomandraceae – Chase, Ruddall & Conran 1996; Conran, in Kubitzki 1998. There may be others that I hadn't noticed.

Arthropodium, the renga lily genus, is placed by different authors in the same family as *Cordyline* or in other families. Phil Simpson, in *Dancing Leaves*, his excellent book about cabbage trees, used Lomandraceae as the family name. He also provided much information about the various monocot genera that have, at times, been linked with *Cordyline*. These many changes in supposed family connections reflect the difficulties of characterising relationships among the "tree-like" or "shrub-like" (as well as herbaceous) monocots, based on purely morphological features. They are also the result of successive advances in anatomic, chemotaxonomic and DNA studies of the monocots.