ERIC JOHN GODLEY: THE COMPLEAT BOTANIST

In June 1999 colleagues and friends of Eric Godley celebrated his 80th birthday anniversary with a two day symposium held at Lincoln University. The symposium covered a very wide range of botanical subjects. The occasion ended with a dinner in Eric's honour at which Eric's old friends Henry Connor and Geoff Baylis (and Eric himself), spoke. Many a hilarious story was told at this very pleasant event. This article puts on record a brief summary of Eric's professional life and work. It was compiled from information supplied by Trish Faulkner (librarian, Landcare Research, Lincoln), Andy Thomson, Warwick Harris and Colin Webb.

Eric Godley was born in Auckland on 10 May, 1919. He attended Takapuna Grammar School, Auckland Teachers' Training College and Auckland University, where he graduated M.Sc. with Hons in Botany in 1942. He was a keen plant enthusiast from childhood and, as a student was active in the University Field Club and Auckland Botanical Society. However, the World was at war in 1942 and Eric was soon in the New Zealand Army, serving in North Africa and Italy.

When war ended Eric spent two years (1946-47) at Cambridge University (Trinity College) gaining his Ph.D. Returning to New Zealand he lectured in Botany at the University of Auckland, 1947-51. He joined the New Zealand D.S.I.R. in 1951, firstly as Senior Geneticist at Crop Research Division, Lincoln. He became Director of that Division in 1952, but switched to Directorship of Botany Division, Lincoln in 1958, holding the position until his retirement in 1980. However, he continued as D.S.I.R. Lincoln Centre Chairman until 1984. Since then he has been a Research Associate at Botany Division (now Landcare Research). His academic and other awards and honours are: Ph.D. (Cantab.), F.R.S.N.Z., Hon. F.L.S., Assoc. of Honour R.I.H., O.B.E., Corresponding Member, Chilean Academy of Science, Holder of Loder Cup 1984 and Hutton Medal of Royal Society of N.Z. 1986.
The development of botany as a scientific discipline in New Zealand has been very profoundly influenced by Eric Godley. Some of his most important contributions are now briefly outlined.

The facilities which make Lincoln Botany Division New Zealand’s principal centre for research on indigenous and naturalised plants were much enhanced during Eric Godley’s Directorship. The herbarium, library collections, laboratories, glasshouses, experimental gardens, and live plant collections are tangible proof of his energy and diplomatic skills. He was also highly respected as a manager of the personnel who worked at Lincoln. He presided over a first rate staff, with high morale and motivation.

Projects developed under Eric’s guidance include: A chain of regional D.S.I.R. botanical centres throughout New Zealand; the foundation of the New Zealand Journal of Botany and the New Zealand Botanical Society; taxonomic studies leading to the publication of the Flora of New Zealand series (including the completion of Vol. 1, the start and completion of Vols. 2 and 3; the start of the Lichen flora and Vols. 4 and 5); other taxonomic publications including many journal articles, and monographs on alpine *Ranunculus* and *Epilobium*.

Under Eric’s leadership the Botany Division staff of scientists carried out diverse and productive research, including projects and many publications on: chromosome counts on New Zealand plants; wood anatomy; atlases of the pollen and seeds of the indigenous flora; ethnobotany relevant to Aotearoa; ecology and conservation, including studies on National Parks, Scenic Reserves and offshore islands; new reservations for conservation purposes; endangered indigenous plants; the weed flora; palaeobotany; botanical art connected with Botany Division publications; the description of the New Zealand vegetation.

Not least of Eric Godley’s efforts has been in his own very energetic research career, which continues to this day. He is a very fluent and accomplished writer about this work. The main topics that have interested him are: reproductive systems of New Zealand flowering plants; systematics of certain genera; vegetation, flora and biogeography of the southern cool temperate zone (New Zealand, Subantarctic islands, southern South America); biographies of New Zealand botanists, in relation to their studies (see the list of
publications below). Since retirement Eric has further published, in the *New Zealand Botanical Society Newsletter* up to May 1999, 33 accounts of the lives and work of early botanists in this country. His is a major contribution to the history of botanical science in this country. Also he wrote many fascinating articles about facets of the life of plants, for the *New Zealand Gardener*. Manuka Press is to publish the collected articles next year, in a single volume.

Eric John Godley has had an outstanding career as an administrator and researcher on the botany of New Zealand. He has always been a most courteous and effective person in his relationships with immediate colleagues and also with people in organisations outside the D.S.I.R. Without doubt he is New Zealand’s most eminent living botanist.

We wish him well for the future.

Eric Godley, sketched at a Botany Division staff meeting, 1977 (del. Keith West)
PUBLICATIONS BY E. J. GODLEY (up to May 1999)


