

The previous issue of this newsletter was published as a birthday tribute to Geoff Baylis, our first New Zealand born Professor of Botany, who turned 90 on the day of publication.

Sadly, he died before the year was out. Others will acknowledge and acclaim Geoff's early days, when he turned what he said was his 'great advantage in being poor' into determination to win scholarships, when he reluctantly distinguished himself as a submarine-sinking war hero, when he headed with distinction the Botany Department at the University of Otago for over 30 years, and did ground-breaking research on arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi.

My association with Geoff is all too recent, beginning when I joined the newly re-started Botanical Society of Otago (BSO) in 1999. By then he was a little old man with twinkling eyes who would walk down to meetings, with David Galloway if he was in town, and sit near the front, following proceedings with interest. His comments were always pertinent, constructive and informative. Often he would follow these up with a related note for the newsletter, which I appreciated even more when I became editor.

So when Bastow Wilson suggested that BSO institute an annual lecture named in honour of Professor Baylis, while he was still here to appreciate the honour, I was enthusiastic about the idea. Thus it fell upon me the task of approaching Geoff to seek his permission, and then to interview him for the newsletter, if he agreed. The task was not made easier by my then hearing that Geoff had advanced lung cancer, and I approached him with some trepidation. But Geoff received me courteously, like the gentleman he was. At first he was humbled by our proposition, but as he showed me round the wonderful garden he had created, primarily as a source of fresh material for the Botany Dept, he warmed to the idea.

Later, as plans for the inaugural Geoff Baylis Lecture progressed Geoff's delight at the thought of so many of his widespread botanical 'family' gathering together made it a pleasure to organise such a special occasion. Others thought it special, too – the Marjorie Barclay theatre in the Otago Museum was full to overflowing and the proceedings were recorded on video.

Besides the annual Geoff Baylis lecture Geoff's legacy lives on in many ways. Botanists up and down the country, and further afield, treasure in their gardens the rare plants that Geoff discovered on the Three Kings Islands and brought back for propagation. My own treasure, from a cutting Geoff gave me, is a perennial *Helichrysum* with vibrant yellow everlasting flowers, now flourishing in my garden. I would be happy to pass cuttings on.

Geoff would be pleased to see that the interest in mycorrhizal fungi, which he pioneered, is alive and well at Otago, with a visiting William Evans Fellow speaking this month. He would be even more pleased if his tip about growing the indigenous tree he considered had among the most beautiful flowers in New Zealand, *Ixerba brexiodes*, alongside mycorrhizal-rich *Griselinia littoralis*, was taken up more widely. (See Newsletters 33, 2002, and 40, 2003). That would be a most fitting tribute to a most exceptional botanist.