

Notes toward the concept of "ecological district" Part II*: Greyia in Auckland

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One of the harder-to-identify plants in Albert Park is the large discretely odorous bush just inside the railings at the central entrance off Princes Street. In its crooked branching, crenate suborbicular leaves and scarlet 5-petalled flowers it very much resembles an outsize pelargonium. It is not a member of Geraniaceae though, but rather a Greyia, this being a genus of three species, in a family of its own, closely allied to the Cape honeysuckle family Melianthaceae. All these are South African plants.

Like the well-known adventive Melianthus major, greyias are stout shrubs of rocky dry slopes and headlands. The sweetish leathery fragrance (very like that of Cistus species) our plant has in the heat of the day comes from the resin produced by minute glands in the leaves, and is probably an adaptation to dry habitats.

The genus was discovered and immediately brought into cultivation in the 1850s, at the time Sir George Grey was Governor-General of the Cape Colony, hence its name. Grey collected plants in South Africa but in New Zealand he seems to have been more interested in animals and in gardening, and he collected only a few ferns (Lanjouw & Stafleu, 1957).

There are good illustrations of the three species: G. sutherlandii (Hooker 1873), G. flanagani (Oliver 1894), G. radlkoferi (Cronquist 1981, p. 562), and an account of the genus by Palmer & Pitman (1972). Despite this I am not quite certain of the identity of the Albert Park plant. Its glabrous leaves and terminal inflorescences would seem to make it G. sutherlandii, and after all Hooker did say that material from the introduction of this species was so extensively distributed that it "is now one of the commonest plants in European Botanic Gardens".

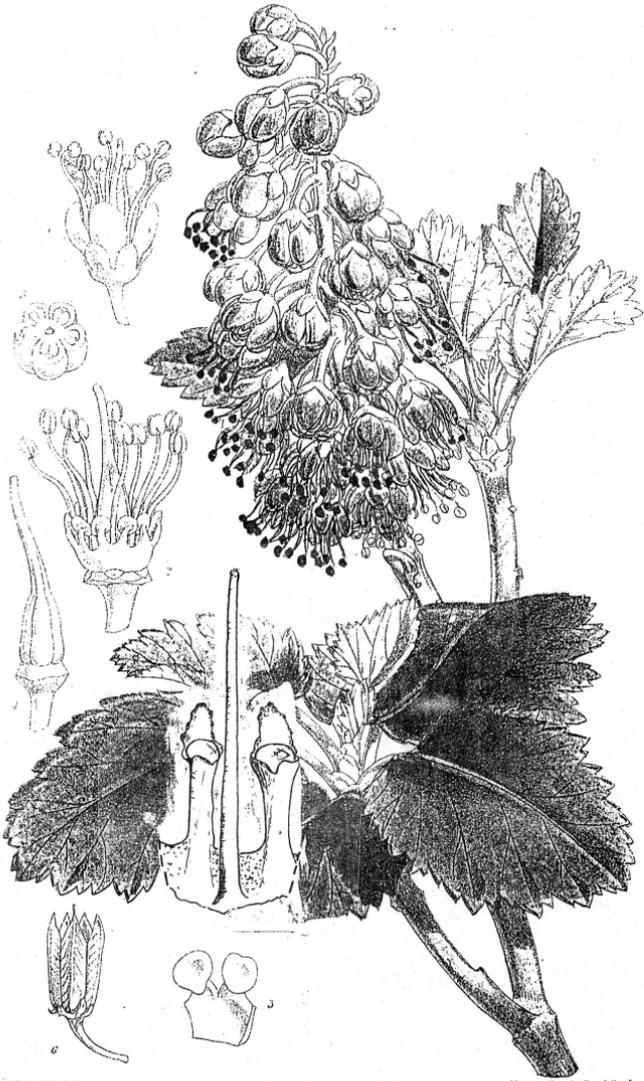
The illustration of G. sutherlandii, however, reproduced here, shows flowers with staminodia that terminate in "glandular discs", whereas the staminodia of our plant are formed like little toothed nectar-bearing goblets (see my addition above inset 3), not exactly matched in any of the illustrations.

The only other plant I have seen of Greyia around Auckland was a large several metres high bush in front of an old cottage in Oakland Road, Karaka. Though it was flourishing on this rather dry and exposed site it did not survive a recent redevelopment of the section. Its leaves were densely white-felted below and its staminodia were cup-like but not toothed, so it seems likely to have been G. radlkoferi.

REFERENCES

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* Part I see Auckland Bot. Soc. Jnl 43(1): 42-5 1988.



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Vincent Powell: Day & Son, Eng.

Greya sutherlandii