



GEORGE N. BATIANOFF Q.D.A., B.A.

Ecologist, Weed Scientist

Born: Culdja (Yining), Sinkiang, China, April 24, 1945

Died: Brisbane, February 20, 2009

George Batianoff's life was marked by overcoming many obstacles and barriers in his life, and this resulted in a very full and productive life doing what became his passion, his deep interest in the vegetation of Queensland coastal communities, the ecology of Queensland serpentine vegetation and the study of invasive and weedy plants.

He was internationally respected for his scientific contributions to seashore vegetation including the mapping, ecology and management of beaches, the flora and ecology of serpentine vegetation, and the relationships between seabirds and plants on Raine Island. At the time of his death George was undertaking coral cay, serpentine ecology and weed research.

He was a prolific writer who believed passionately in publishing his work, and he published 95 scientific papers of which he was the primary author of 81. However, he collaborated widely with 57 other co-authors. He had a diverse range of ecological research interests which ranged from beaches and coastal

vegetation (22 papers), to a love of island vegetation (30 papers) and seabirds (4 papers). He had a fascination with the unique flora of serpentine regions worldwide, and was an expert in the serpentine flora of central Queensland (11 papers). His other quest was to document the impact of invasive plants on the environment and the development of appropriate management practices (18 papers). He was always driven towards real conservation outcomes from his work and his research on Mt Coolool led to the unique flora of this area being protected as a National Park. George is honoured by having three Queensland coastal plants named after him; a scrambling and spiny shrub *Capparis batianoffii*, a herb *Plectranthus batianoffii* and a grass *Paspalum batianoffii*.

George Nicholaivich Batianoff was just two weeks old when his father Leonid Nickolaivich Aksarin was killed in World War II and his mother, Elena Petrovna Volodina, married his adopted father Nicholai Andeivich Batianoff five years later. From the early age of six George learned to identify plants at the foot of the Altai Mountains, by collecting herbs, fruits, nuts and berries for food, which was stored for the long winters. He lived among the tribal people with their array of colourful costumes for 13 years, speaking the local Turkish dialect of the Uygur language.

In 1958 his family was displaced, travelling as refugees to Shanghai, eventually migrating to Australia via Hong Kong. Aged just 14 and unable to speak any English, George arrived in Brisbane with his mother and two sisters in November 1959. During his adolescent years he worked part-time as a fruit and vegetable picker, factory hand, kitchen hand in hospitals and a builder's labourer, while attending East Brisbane and Cavendish Road State High Schools. He took out Australian citizenship in 1963 and served for four years in the CMF (Civilian Military Force). In the same year he won a scholarship to the Queensland Agricultural College at Gatton, graduating with a Diploma in Agriculture in 1965.

From 1966 to 1973 he worked as an Experimentalist for the Department of Primary Industries, firstly in Charleville for three years on wool funded research projects into the ecology of mulga scrubs and soil moisture of Mitchell grass black clay soils. He met his wife Judy in Charleville and was married in 1969. For two years he worked in Ipswich researching forage crops under irrigation, also attending University of Queensland part-time studying Botany

and Zoology. In 1971 he was given the responsibility of managing Agrostology projects at the Brigalow Research Station near Moura. However, at the age of twenty-nine he wished to pursue a career in plant ecology and joined the Queensland Herbarium in Brisbane in February 1974.

From 1974 to 1991 he worked as a coastal survey officer involved in assessment of vegetation and coastal floristic inventories from the Coral Sea to the Gold Coast. From 1979-1985 he attended University of Queensland part-time and gained a B.A. majoring in Biogeography and was appointed a Principal Botanist 1992. Since 1990 his research activities have included environmental weeds, serpentine flora and rehabilitation of mined areas in Central Queensland, ecology of coral cays particularly the *Pisonia grandis* rainforest and the seabirds breeding habitats. He collected and incorporated some 20 000 specimens into the Queensland Herbarium, with duplicates sent to other herbaria. Some of his important collections of Queensland flora include about 7 000 specimens of naturalised plant species and a large number of native species from offshore islands.

George was a very colourful character and collaborated enthusiastically with other people throughout Queensland, as well as nationally and internationally. He was well known for his mischievous sense of humour, "belly" laughter and his direct comments. He had a critical mind, a knack of questioning the scientific position and logic of his colleagues and the ability to think outside the box. He was a risk-taker, with the ability to write original work but was not too concerned with the niceties of bureaucracy. He was very much an individual, with a strong sense of fair play and a creative mind. He was always happy to share his knowledge and support and mentor the younger generation of botanists and ecologists. His love of the Australian landscape, its wildlife and his enthusiasm to collect plant specimens to improve our botanical knowledge rubbed off on others.

George was a devoted husband to his wife Judy for 40 years and father to Andrew, Anne-Louise and Nicholas. He is also survived by his mother Elena.

During his short and devastating battle with Motor Neurone Disease, George exhibited great courage and a positive attitude. He never lost his sense of humour and was busy writing reports and checking manuscripts till the last day.

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