

Clianthus puniceus

[Synonyms : *Donia punicea*]

PARROT'S BILL is an evergreen shrub. Native to New Zealand (possibly in two areas of Urewawa National Park) and has pea-like scarlet, pink or white flowers with long boat-shaped nectar-filled keels.

It is also known as *Bogenblume* (German), *Cliante* (French), *Cliantos* (Portuguese), Glory flower, Glory pea, Kaka beak, Kaka bill, *Kowhai ngutu-kaka* (Maori), Lobster claw, New Zealand glory pea, *Papegøjenæb* (Danish), *Papegojnäbb* (Swedish), Parrot's beak, *Prachtblume* (German), Red kaka beak, Red kowhai, *Ruhmesblume* (German), and *Ritarinköynnös* (Finnish).

The flowers are pollinated by birds attracted to the copious nectar on to which the pollen has been shed. The pollen ends up on their foreheads from which this flower's stigma has already brushed pollen from a previously visited flower.

Parrot's bill is rare and endangered in the wild in New Zealand (and is included in Madagascar's Red List). Over grazing and collection for horticulture have contributed to its decline.

Puniceus is Latin (crimson, carmine) meaning 'reddish, or rosy or reddish-purple or blood red'. References to a parrot's bill or beak are a description of the shape of the flowers.

Parrot's bill has long been cultivated near their homes by the Maoris, some say as a sacred plant while others suggest for its beauty – perhaps both.

The date of its introduction to England would appear to be debated. Some authorities state that the famous English botanist, Sir Joseph Banks (1744-1820), who accompanied Captain James Cook (1728-1779) on HMS *Endeavour* between 1768 and 1771, returned home from that expedition with this plant from those cultivated by the Maoris – and that it was not until 1834 that parrot's bill was found in the wild in New Zealand by the English plant collector, Richard Cunningham (1793-1835) during his tenure as Colonial Botanist for New South Wales and Superintendent of the Australian Botanic Gardens, Sydney. Whereas others suggest that the introduction was over half a century later when they declare that it was introduced to England in 1831 (and almost immediately the plants were being sold there for £5 each – a large sum at that time).