

Newtonia buchananii

[Synonyms : *Piptadenia buchananii*]

FOREST NEWTONIA is an evergreen tree. Native to tropical Africa it has white or yellow flowers.

It is also known as Lokundu.

The long, slender fruit pods split down one side and flatten when ripe in a characteristic fashion thus revealing slender seeds inside.

Buchananii commemorates a Scottish botanist, plant collector, artist and explorer, John Buchanan (1819-1898). He began his working life designing fabric and wallpaper patterns (often botanical) in Scotland but in 1852 emigrated to New Zealand and the goldfields in South Island. During his early years there he prospected for gold (eventually with some success) and also began collecting and recording native flora, as well as assisting in the provincial survey of part of the Otago region. He came to the attention of Sir Joseph Hooker (1817-1911), some say through his amateur botanist friend, Dr. John Ross, back in Scotland to whom he sent some of his plant collection, and others because he sent large numbers of dried specimens to Kew Gardens in England. Either way, Sir Joseph recommended Buchanan to Sir James Hector (1834-1907), another Scottish-born botanist who had been appointed Director of the Geological Survey of Otago (especially in the high mountains of Fiordland) in 1862. As draughtsman and botanist to the Survey Buchanan was provided with an opportunity to build both a large plant collection and make many celebrated botanical sketches and notes which formed the basis of some of his published works. In 1865 he became responsible for the herbarium of the Geological Survey and Colonial Museum in Wellington. An act of Parliament in 1867 established the New Zealand Institute for the Advancement of Science and Art and Buchanan would not only contribute essays to its journal, *Transactions*, but was also artist and lithographer for the first 19 volumes. On his many botanical and geological trips throughout New Zealand, he continued to collect plants (duplicates of which he still sent to Kew sometimes) and produce reports, botanical drawings, paintings and sketches which can be found in New Zealand and Australian museums and libraries. He was a foundation member of the New Zealand Institute, a Fellow of the Linnean Society and from 1885 (when he retired from the Colonial Museum) a life member of Wellington Philosophical Society. His published works include *The Indigenous Grasses of New Zealand* and among his many botanical drawings and watercolour panoramas is the celebrated *Milford Sound looking north-west from Freshwater Basin*.

In some rural areas in several tropical African countries forest newtonia is being threatened through over-harvesting by local farmers. They prefer it to any other indigenous hardwood for making the carved wooden troughs (beer boats) in which their banana beer is brewed – and also for the durable poles needed for building supports.