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THE FIRST HERBARIUM BOTANIST IN NAIROBI

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ABSTRACT

Evelyn R. Napier (1902–1952) established the herbarium of the Coryndon Museum, where she was employed as botanist from 1930 to 1934. She continued contributing to the herbarium collections after her marriage to D.W. Molony in 1935. Several plants that she collected in Kenya were named in her honour as new species. The Coryndon herbarium was later merged with the herbarium brought to Nairobi from the Amani Institute in Tanzania, to form the East African Herbarium, still located in the National Museum.

INTRODUCTION

In 2002 the East African Herbarium celebrated its 100th anniversary by organising a major exhibition of botanical art. In the guidebook published for the occasion, emphasis was laid on its origin as the Amani Institute Herbarium in Tanzania, established in 1902 (Masinde, 2002). Only a passing reference was made to the fact that in 1958 the Amani Herbarium, having been relocated to Nairobi in 1950, was merged with an existing herbarium in the Coryndon Memorial Museum belonging to the East African Natural History Society. There was similarly scant reference to the Coryndon Museum herbarium in other publications referring to the history of the East African Herbarium (*e.g.* Greenway, 1952; Verdcourt, 1958; Verdcourt, 1981). None of these publications mentioned Miss Evelyn Napier (later Mrs Molony), who was the first botanist at the Coryndon Museum. In this capacity she established the herbarium that would later form a substantial part of what is now the East African Herbarium. None of three published obituaries gives her date of birth, and two have incorrect spelling of her name. In this paper an attempt has been made to gather together what is known of her life and her contributions to botany.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Evelyn Rose Napier was born in 1902, the second daughter of Lord and Lady Napier of Magdala. She was born in Lucknow, India, where her father was working at the time as a civil engineer for the Indian State Railways. In 1922 she arrived in Kenya. Presumably she came with her parents, as Lord Napier is listed (erroneously as "Macdala") by Hutchinson (1996) as one of the "Titled Gentry" living in Nairobi, though without details. As a hobby, she started drawing and painting wild flowers. Some of her art work was seen by Mr Ernest Carr, a keen supporter of the Coryndon Memorial Museum in Nairobi, and he gave the

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museum a grant for the purpose of employing Miss Napier as a botanist, a post that she held for a period of four years. The appointment started in 1930, but as she was not a qualified botanist Miss Napier spent several months in the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, in England, receiving a basic training. She returned to her post at the Museum in 1931. In the 1933 annual report of the society's Honorary Secretary, it was reported that Mr Carr had discontinued his funding. The society managed to divert some funds from elsewhere to support the herbarium, but such was their loyalty that Miss Napier and her assistants continued working with a 33% pay cut. Mrs Merrial Lucking kindly sent me a photograph of her mother (figure 1), which is undated but is thought to have been taken in the early 1930s, before her marriage. Therefore the photograph almost certainly represents Miss Napier as she was when working as botanist in the Coryndon Museum.



Figure 1. Evelyn Napier in the early 1930s, when she was botanist at the Coryndon Museum.

As the museum botanist Miss Napier was an active field collector and a hard-working curator. By the end of her contract in 1934 she had built up a collection of over 4,000 mounted specimens, with another 3,000 awaiting identification and mounting. Some of her expeditions are mentioned in her annual reports, and she is also mentioned by Gillett (1962) and Polhill (1988) as a collector. She sent duplicates of her specimens to Kew, where some were found to be undescribed taxa. Some of these new taxa were named in her honour, with the epithet "*napierae*" (figure 2). At the request of the American authors Alain White and Boyd L. Sloane, who were preparing a much enlarged second edition of their book "The Stapelieae", she sent them plants, comments and illustrations of stapeliads. Miss Napier was herself the author of a series of papers in the journal of the East Africa & Uganda Natural History Society, illustrated with her own drawings. From the text of her published "Notes" it is clear that her Kew training had been thorough, for she discussed plants in detail and was familiar with earlier literature. Her botanical illustrations included line drawings (figure 3),

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paintings and photographs, and examples of all three were published. Some of her paintings were on display in the Botanical Exhibit Room of the museum at that time, and she also contributed colour plates to the first edition of Jex-Blake's book "Gardening in East Africa" (1934).

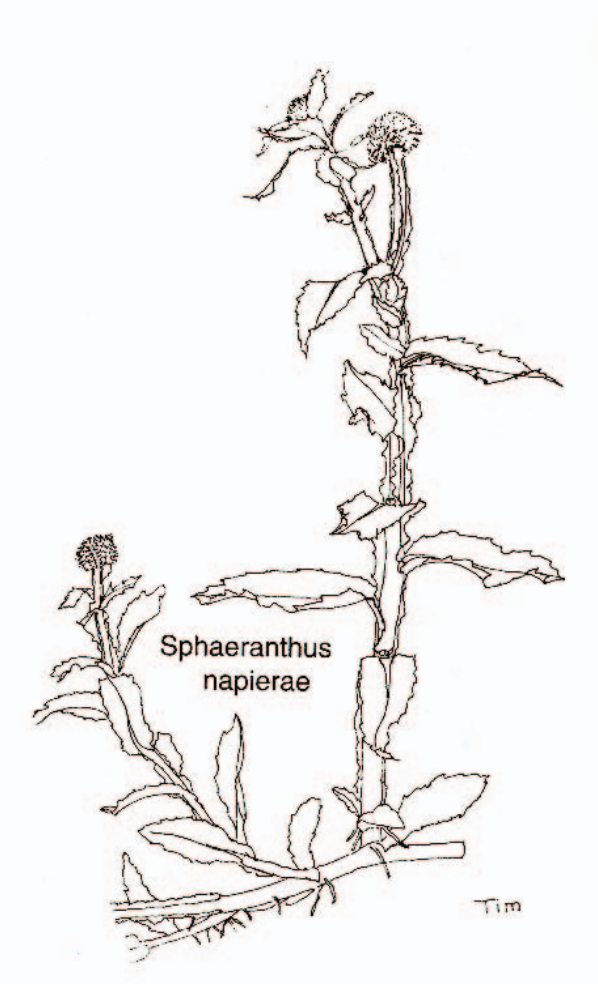


Figure 2. Sphaeranthus napierae *Ross-Craig, drawn by Tim Campbell. (From A.D.Q. Agnew & S. Agnew,* Upland Kenya Wild Flowers, *Second Edition, 1994.)*

At the end of her contract with the museum, Miss Napier went to England. In 1935 she returned to Kenya to marry Mr Desmond Walter Molony, whom she had known since 1926. Mr Molony was a farmer, and at first the newly married couple farmed at Mweiga, on the Aberdares. In 1945 they bought a farm near Nakuru, on the Nakuru to Njoro road. In spite of a busy married life on the farm with two children to raise, Mrs Molony still collected plants occasionally for the herbarium, as reported by her successor, Dr Peter R.O. Bally (1953). In 1937, two stapeliad taxa were named for her by White and Sloane, with the epithet "*molonyae*". Following the start of the Second World War, with her husband going on military service, Mrs Molony was far too busy to continue her botanical work and her

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Figure 3. Thalictrum rhynchocarpum *Dill & Rich. and* Berberis holstii *Engl, drawn by Evelyn Napier, labelled in her hand. (From* Jour. East Afr. & Uganda Nat. Hist. Soc*. 12: t. II. 1934.)*

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collecting and herbarium visits came to an end. Sadly, she died prematurely in 1952 after a long and courageous battle against cancer. Her achievements as chronicled in this paper, especially her many herbarium specimens in Kew and Nairobi, will ensure that she is not forgotten as the pioneer herbarium botanist in Kenya.

EVELYN NAPIER'S PUBLICATIONS

Botanical report for 1931. *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* **10**: 135 (1931).

Annual report, Division of Botany, 1932. *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* **11**: 83 (1932).

Notes on wild flowers. *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* **11**: 138–141 + 6 plates (1933).

Botanical notes. *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* **11**: 218–224 + 6 plates (1934).

Botanical notes. *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* **12**: 52–56 + 4 plates (1934).

Annual report, Botanical section, 1934. *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* **12**: 142–143 (1934).

[The 1933 botanical report was apparently omitted erroneously from the journal, though it was mentioned in the society's main annual report.]

PUBLISHED ILLUSTRATIONS BY EVELYN NAPIER

Napier, E. (1933–1934) Line drawings in the three papers cited above.

Jex-Blake, A.J. (1934) *Gardening in East Africa*, First Edition: colour plates 2, 3, 5 & 6 (paintings). Longmans, Green & Co., London, New York & Toronto.

White, A. & Sloane, B.L. (1937) *The Stapelieae*. Second Edition: figs. 349, 844 (drawings); figs. 116, 178, 350, 369, 370 (photographs). Abbey San Encino Press, Pasadena.

EPONYMY—PLANTS NAMED AFTER EVELYN NAPIER

ACANTHACEAE

Dicliptera napierae Bruce, *Kew Bulletin* **1932**: 99 (1932).

APOCYNACEAE (Asclepiadoideae)

Huernia keniensis Fries var. *molonyae* White & Sloane, *The Stapelieae*. Second Edition, 3: 832 & 1144 (1937).

Stapelia molonyae White & Sloane, *The Stapelieae*. Second Edition, 2: 425 (1937). [= *Orbea semota* (N.E. Br.) Leach]

ASTERACEAE (COMPOSITAE)

Bidens napierae Sherff, *Botanical Leaflets, Chicago* No. **5**: 17 (1951).

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Sphaeranthus napierae Ross-Craig, *Hooker's Icones Plantarum* **36**: 52–55, t. 3511 (1954).

LITERATURE ON, OR REFERRING TO, EVELYN NAPIER

Bally, P.R.O. (1953) Obituary. *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* **22**: 44–45.

Bally, P.R.O. (1967) *Huernia keniensis*. *Flowering Plants of Africa* **38**: t. 1511 + 3 pp. text.

Desmond, R. (1994) *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturalists*. Taylor & Francis Ltd & The Natural History Museum, London. [as "Moloney"]

Eggli, U. & Newton, L.E. (2004) *Etymological Dictionary of Succulent Plant Names*. Springer, Berlin.

Gillett, J.B. (1962) The history of the botanical exploration of the area of "The Flora of Tropical East Africa". *Comptes Rendus IV Réunion AETFAT*: 205–229.

H., P. 1952. Appreciation: The Hon. Mrs Evelyn Moloney (*sic*!). *East African Standard* No. 11898, page 5. [Signed "P.H." and probably written by Pam(ela) Hamilton, who was a personal friend of Mrs Molony.]

Milne-Redhead, E. (1952) Obituary. *Kew Bulletin* **7**: 439. [as "Moloney"]

Newton, L.E. (1994) Field work required. *Ballya* **1**: 66. [on *Huernia keniensis* var. *molonyae*]

Newton, L.E. (1999) *Peter Bally and His Succulent Plant Legacy*. Privately published, Nairobi.

Polhill, D. (1988) *Flora of Tropical East Africa. Index of Collecting Localities*. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

White, A. & Sloane, B.L. (1937) *The Stapelieae*. Second Edition. Abbey San Encino Press, Pasadena. [Assistance acknowledged.]

Miss Napier's herbarium specimens have been cited in several taxonomic publications, and some were types of new taxa, but no attempt has been made to locate and list these references. To give just one example, the specimen *E.R. Napier 755* is the type of *Barleria spinisepala* Bruce, published in 1932.

PUBLISHED PHOTOGRAPH OF EVELYN NAPIER

Bally, P.R.O. (1953) *Journal of the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society* **22**: 44. [as The Hon. Mrs E.R. Molony]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Hutchinson, T.H. (1996) *1996 Kenya Up-Country Directory containing the names of some of the expatriates of European origin who have lived and worked in up-country Kenya*. Privately published, Koru.

Masinde, P.S. (2002) A brief history of the East African Herbarium. In: P.S. Masinde & G.W. Ngugi, *Botanical Expressions ... plants thro' art. A Botanical Exhibition 29 June to 27 August 2002*. Pp. 1–3. National Museums of Kenya, Nairobi.

Verdcourt, B. (1958) Dr. P.J. Greenway. *Taxon* **7**: 69–71.

Verdcourt, B. (1981) P.J. Greenway 1897–1980. *Kew Bulletin* **36**: 1–7.

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