

Local TV report on New Caledonia leads to discovery of a new plant species

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Leichhardtia weari on Yandé Island. Credit: Patrick Dayé

A team at the Department of Plant Systematics at the University of Bayreuth has recently identified a new plant species of the genus *Leichhardtia* on New Caledonia and presented it in the journal

Phytotaxa. This discovery was triggered by a television report from a local TV station on New Caledonia about a research trip to the hard-to-access island of Yandé northwest of the main island of New Caledonia.

The botanical excursion aimed to rediscover a plant on the island Yandé, which was known to grow there in the past, but has since disappeared. They also intended to analyze the vegetation of the island completely. The local TV station Caledonia reported about this excursion in its program "Weari." The verb weari means "to protect" or "to preserve" in Paicî, the most widely spoken indigenous Kanak language in New Caledonia.

The TV report was followed on YouTube by French botanist Dr. Gildas Gâteblé—the director of the botanical garden "Villa Thuret" in Antibes—who thought he saw a [species](#) of the genus *Leichhardtia* unknown to him in the footage. This plant had been described in the TV report as *Leichhardtia neomicrostoma*, a known species from the north of New Caledonia, but clearly differs from it by the cylindrical-urn-shaped flowers, which are only three millimeters long.

Based on this observation, the finder of the plant, the local plant expert Dominique Fleurot from Koumac in Northern New Caledonia, organized a second field trip to the island to collect material for a thorough study of this plant.

Prof. Dr. Sigrid Liede-Schumann and PD Dr. Ulrich Meve analyzed the material morphologically and molecularly in the Bayreuth Plant Systematics laboratory. It turned out that Dr. Gildas Gâteblé was right with his observation: the plant is indeed a new species of the genus *Leichhardtia*, not closely related to *L. neomicrostoma*. This discovery brings the number of known *Leichhardtia* species on New Caledonia to 20. They are exclusively distributed on this Pacific archipelago east of Australia, which is a [biodiversity hotspot](#) with its large number of

endemic species.

In a paper for the journal *Phytotaxa*, the new species has now been described under the name *Leichhardtia wearii*, in reference to the name of the television program to which its discovery is owed. In Kanak culture, it is customary to officially introduce new terms and names, which takes the form of traditional gestures. A first gesture was performed on 27 May 2023 on Yandé Island to officially incorporate the name of the television program into the Paicî language. Both the local chief and New Caledonian media as well as representatives of the Paicî culture and language participated in the event. In a second ceremony, the plant name "wéari" will also be officially introduced.

More information: Gildas GâTeblé et al, A new threatened New Caledonian *Leichhardtia* (Apocynaceae, Asclepiadoideae, Marsdenieae) species discovered from a TV programme and social media, *Phytotaxa* (2023). [DOI: 10.11646/phytotaxa.591.2.1](https://doi.org/10.11646/phytotaxa.591.2.1)

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