



Figure 1: *Passiflora* 'Amethyst'

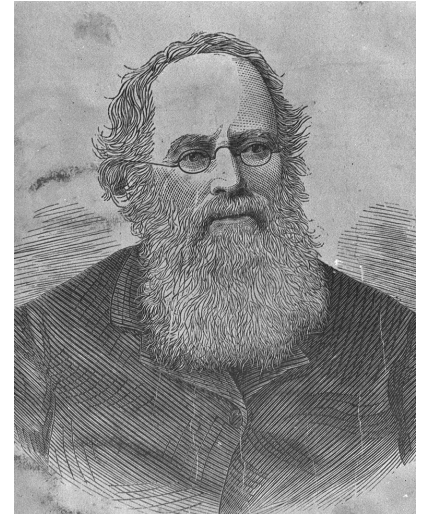


Figure 2: Sir William Macarthur

# *Passiflora hybrida floribunda*: The Original *P.* 'Amethyst'?

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## Introduction

*Passiflora* 'Amethyst' (**Fig. 1**) is a popular cultivar with obscure origins. Morphological similarities between *P.* 'Amethyst' and a late 19th century hybrid, *P.*  $\times$  *kewensis* (now apparently lost to cultivation), suggest that the two plants had the same parents: *P. kermesina* Link & Otto (named *P. raddiana* in early sources) and *P. caerulea* L. (King et al. 2002; King and Frank 2003). This hypothesis is supported by the results of modern crosses (Irvine 2020; King and Frank 2003).

This paper examines the history of an early *Passiflora* hybrid that is a compelling candidate for the original *P.* 'Amethyst'. Originally named *P. floribunda*, and later *P. hybrida floribunda*, the plant was produced in New South Wales in 1845 from a cross of the same two parents. Using online resources, the paper reviews the worldwide distribution and cultivation of this overlooked hybrid.

## *Passiflora floribunda*: A Camden Park hybrid

Camden Park Estate was established in the colony of New South Wales by Captain John Macarthur (1767-1834), an army officer and later a pioneer of the Australian woollen industry. Entangled in the Rum Rebellion, he is alleged to have shot

his commanding officer in a duel and was exiled to England in 1801 to be court-martialled. There, he befriended powerful individuals, such as the Earl (later Marquess) Camden, and the case against him was dismissed. Lord Camden endorsed a grant of 5,000 acres land to Macarthur in 1805. Although the governor of New South Wales was initially opposed, the grant was eventually confirmed and extended, and the estate and surrounding village that grew up were named after Macarthur's benefactor (Atkinson 1988; *Camden Park Estate* 2020).

John's son, Sir William Macarthur (**Fig. 2**), travelled with his father during his exile and returned to New South Wales in 1817. There, he became a prominent agriculturalist and horticulturist with worldwide connections. By the time that Camden House (**Fig. 3**) was completed in about 1835, there were already extensive gardens on site.

*Hortus Camdenensis* is an online catalogue of the plants grown at Camden Park Estate (Mills 2010). The catalogue was compiled by the late Colin Mills using the papers of the estate owners, which are themselves available online through the State Library of New South Wales (Macarthur 1789). Camden Park Estate held a large collection of plants, with over 3300 species documented in *Hortus Camdenensis* for the period 1820-60.

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Figure 3: Camden Park House, by Conrad Martens (1843), painted shortly after Camden House was completed.

These plants were propagated and sold locally, domestically, and internationally. The estate carried out a brisk trade in grapevines, fruit trees, and ornamental varieties.

These online resources provide a glimpse into early trade of *Passiflora* cultivars. William Macarthur regularly provided lists of *desiderata* to his European contacts. The hybrid *P. × Loudoni* (now *P. × loudonii*) was received from Loddiges nursery of Hackney in 1850, and the estate grew and sold other European hybrids, such as *P. × buonapartea*. Elsewhere, receipt of seeds from contacts in Chile and Tahiti is recorded.

The estate was involved in plant breeding. In a letter written in November 1845 to botanist John Carne Bidwell (1815-1853), Macarthur described hybridization efforts with *Passiflora*:

We have raised a considerable batch of seedlings from the crossed *Passiflora* seed, some of which are now 8 or 10 feet high and beginning to show flower buds. The most promising looking are *Kermesina × caerulea* and *caerulea-racemosa* by *Kermesina*. (Mills 2010a)

The parent plants for the first cross had been in the estate's collection since at least 1843. In 1846, Macarthur recorded a detailed description (Fig. 4) of one of these new hybrids, which he named *Passiflora floribunda* (strikethrough is original):

*Passiflora floribunda* (*Kermesina × by Caerulea*)

Petals 10 in number, corolla 4-5 inches in diameter, sepals greenish brown without, bright red lilac, approaching to crimson, within in two distinct shades of color. Petals red lilac, filamentous appendages round throat of tube in several distinct rows, about the two lower about 2 inches in diameter, colored dark chocolate purple and bright blue separated by a band of white. [unclear] 5/8 [inches] high styles purple mottled with green, stigmas brownish green - pollen yellow, foot stalks 3-5 inches, flowers

*Passiflora floribunda* (*Kermesina × by Caerulea*)  
 Petals 10 in number, corolla 4-5 inches in diameter, sepals greenish brown without, bright red lilac, approaching to crimson, within in two distinct shades of color. Petals red lilac, filamentous appendages round throat of tube in several distinct rows, about the two lower about 2 inches in diameter, colored dark chocolate purple and bright blue separated by a band of white. Stems 5/8 high styles purple mottled with green stigmas brownish green pollen yellow - foot stalks 3-5 inches flowers fragrant. A very distinct plant of rapid growth.

Figure 4: Macarthur's description of *P. floribunda*, from a gardening notebook of 1846.

fragrant & in great profusion. A very distinct plant of rapid growth, flowers early. (Mills 2010b; Macarthur 1846)

Macarthur wrote of his new hybrid in a letter to Loddiges in 1846:

I hoped to have sent likewise a plant or two of the beautiful new *Passiflora* which from its profusion of blossom we have named *floribunda*. It has something of the habit of *Kermesina* but is rather more robust, with flowers in constant succession, of very similar form, but much larger being as much as 5 inches diameter, colour a bright red lilac much more brilliant than that of *caerulea-racemosa* to which it is very superior in beauty. It will probably prove to be quite as hardy, with respect to cold being raised by crossing between *Caerulea* and *Kermesina*. (Mills 2010b)

*P. floribunda* was apparently not described in any formal publication. However, the National Gallery of Victoria holds a botanical illustration that seems to depict the plant (Fig. 5). Entitled "A trail of passion flowers" and dated to c.1860, the subject matches most aspects of Macarthur's description. The illustration is by Edward La Trobe Bateman, who left England in 1852 and worked variously as a book illuminator, draughtsman, architectural decorator, and garden designer, primarily in the Melbourne area. At this early date and location, there seems to be no other plausible candidate for Bateman's subject apart from Macarthur's *P. floribunda*.

The plant appeared in the 1857 catalogue for Camden Park Estate, but Macarthur had distributed *P. floribunda* well before this. It was shipped to John Bailey's nursery in Adelaide early in 1846. It was shipped to Bidwell in Tahiti in June 1846 (Fig. 6) and was presented to the Sydney Botanic Garden on





Figure 5: "A trail of passion flowers", by Edward La Trobe Bateman (c.1860)

September 15, 1847, around the time that Bidwell became its inaugural director (Macarthur 1846).

*P. floribunda* was shipped to Loddiges in England in February 1849, together with a sibling plant, *P. floribunda minor*, and three backcrossings of *P. floribunda* × *P. kermesina*, numbered 01, 10, and 12. Macarthur wrote to Loddiges:

The passion flowers will flower poorly in their present pots. The two varieties named *floribunda* and *floribunda minor* are fine and quite distinct from their parents - The other three which have only numbers attached are also very pretty but differ too little from *Kermesina* - If you consider them to be worth attention be good enough to name them as Camden hybrids - If you give *floribunda* room enough it will grow luxuriantly producing immense leaves and flowers more than five inches across in great profusion. (Macarthur 1849)

*P. floribunda* was shipped again to England later the same month, to the nursery of James Backhouse & Sons in Yorkshire, with Macarthur describing it as a "very showy hybrid" and "worth cultivation" (Macarthur 1849). Of possible significance to the later history of *P. floribunda*, Backhouse was connected to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, having collected specimens for them on his travels as a Quaker missionary.

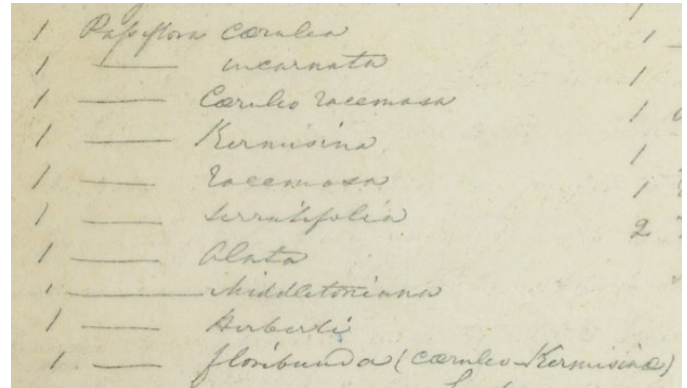


Figure 6: Packing list of *Passiflora* cultivars sent from Camden Park Estate to John Bidwell in Tahiti in 1846

### Distribution of *P. floribunda* as *P. hybrida floribunda*

A plant of the same reputed parentage named *Passiflora hybrida floribunda* was well known and circulating throughout latter half of the 19th century. It appears that *P. floribunda* was renamed *P. hybrida floribunda* on its arrival in England to distinguish it from the then-recent description of the species *Passiflora floribunda* Lemaire (Lemaire 1848). This plant was much later to be recognized by Killip as a synonym of *Passiflora sexflora* Juss. (Killip 1938).

The earliest reference to *P. hybrida floribunda* outside the Australian continent is found in an 1860 list of stove plants in the collection of none other than Charles Darwin (Darwin 1999). It has been suggested that this list consisted of the plants sent to Darwin by Joseph Dalton Hooker, director of Kew.

The plant also made its way to the North America. The 1861 exhibition of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society included a "pretty new passiflora, (*hybrida floribunda*)" in a collection of forty plants presented by Boston nursery owners, Hovey and Co. (Hovey 1861; Rand 1862). The cultivar is listed in four of their nursery catalogues published in the 1870s (Hovey & Co. 1871; 1872; 1873; 1876).

In the UK, the plant was mentioned in many horticultural publications of the period. *P. hybrida floribunda* was one of several creepers recommended for conservatories by nursery owners E.G. Henderson & Sons of St. John's Wood, who described it as "purplish lilac" (Thomson, William and Dean 1870).

In 1873, popular plant writer J. Shirley Hibberd declared:

Like everything else, some are better than others. We want the best, and the following selection cannot be improved upon for the greenhouse: *P. Caerulea*, *P. Colvilli* (sic), *P. hybrida floribunda*, *P. Loudoniana* (sic), *P. Cincinnati* (sic) and *P. racemosa purpurea*. (Hibberd 1873)

*P. hybrida floribunda* was described as “apparently a cross between *P. caerulea* and *P. Raddiana*” by Burbidge in 1876, and was recommended again by Hibberd for greenhouse cultivation in 1879 (Burbidge 1877; J. S. Hibberd 1879). In 1880, periodical *The Garden* reported:

*P. hybrida floribunda* adds variety, inasmuch as it has purplish flowers inserted in the axils of the leaves instead of being collected in racemes. *P. Campbelli* is a cross between *coerulea* (sic), and some of the purple kinds nearly related to *hybrida floribunda*. (Miller 1880)

In 1881, *P. hybrida floribunda* was identified for a reader of *The Gardeners' Chronicle* based on material submitted to the editor (Masters 1881). The 1900 tome, *The Book of Gardening*, listed “*P. caerulea*... and var. *racemosa*, Imperatrice Eugenie, *P. hybrida floribunda*, and Constance Elliott (sic)” as recommended varieties (Drury 1900).

On the continent, an 1879 report from the Association for the Promotion of Horticulture in the Royal Prussian States describes a plant named *P. floribunda* (without “*hybrida*”) growing in the botanical gardens in Berlin. The plant was described as a hybrid of *P. caerulea* and *P. kermesina* (Wittmack 1879). Retention of Macarthur’s original name in this report suggests that the plant may have made its way to Berlin independently of the shipments to England, whereas the plants in America under the same revised name suggest a common point of distribution.

### Masters’ observations on *P. hybrida floribunda*

Maxwell T. Masters included *P. hybrida floribunda* in an 1870 list of *Passiflora* cultivars, appending the abbreviation “*Hort.*” to indicate an established name that had not been formally published or described (Masters 1874). It has been said that Masters asserted *P. kermesina* × *P. caerulea* parentage but provided no other information to support this claim (King et al. 2002). While this is true of the 1870 list, Masters did report observations of this plant elsewhere that increase confidence in the parentage he ascribed.

In 1871, Masters noted that *P. kermesina* and *P. hybrida floribunda* were both apt to produce similar unusual growth of filaments around the stamens and the ovary (Masters 1871). He addressed the issue of the parentage of *P. hybrida floribunda* at a meeting of the Scientific Committee of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1888. This meeting was held shortly after the first flowering at Kew of the new hybrid, *P. × kewensis* (Robinson 1888a). The brief summary of this presentation reads:

*Passiflora kewensis* × - Dr. Masters showed drawing of this hybrid, as also of *P. hybrida floribunda* to show how closely similar they were. *P. kewensis* × was known to be a hybrid out of *P. kermesina* by *caerulea*, and *P. hybrida floribunda* in all probability had the same origin. (Robinson 1888b)

The contents of Masters’ library were auctioned in 1907 following his death.

### *P. hybrida floribunda* is distinct from an Erfurt hybrid of the same name

Confusion was added to the history of the Camden Park hybrid when nurserymen Haage and Schmidt of Erfurt used the same name to describe a different plant in 1883 (Uhink 1883b). This new hybrid was the result of a cross of *P. × Loudoni* and *P. racemosa*. An illustration shows that it produced reddish flowers in clusters, as may well be expected for a plant of this parentage.

Remarking on the Erfurt hybrid, *The Gardeners' Chronicle* (of which Masters was editor) noted:

...as there is already a well-known form of this name in common cultivation, we suggested to Messrs. Haage & Schmidt that the name of their seedling be changed, and that, to avoid confusion with natural species, a vernacular rather than a Latin name should be given. (Masters 1883)

The Erfurt cultivar was renamed *P. ‘Professor Eichler’* as a result (Uhink 1883a).

Although many references to the Erfurt hybrid under its original name are found in literature in the years after 1883, these are distinguished by references to breeder names or to Uhink’s publication in *Gärtner-Zeitung*.

### Later history of *P. hybrida floribunda*

The original *P. hybrida floribunda* remained commercially available and apparently well known after the turn of the century.

In Australia, *P. floribunda* (the original name) is mentioned twice in the newspaper (*Brisbane Courier* 1895; *Brisbane Courier* 1906). A 1906 article - also republished in 1928 - was written by the director of the Brisbane Botanic Gardens, and recommends the plant to readers. The *P. floribunda* referred to here can be readily distinguished from the species name *P. floribunda* Lemaire (syn. *P. sexflora* Juss.) due to the article’s mention of pink to deep rose flowers and year-round flowering habit.

In the UK, *P. hybrida floribunda* is listed in the digitized catalogues for the Kent nursery of H. Cannell & Sons from 1888 to 1909, marking at least 22 years of continuous commercial availability (H. Cannell & Sons 1888; 1894; 1895; 1897; 1899; 1904; 1909).



Thereafter, something of a fog descends on the history of *P. hybrida floribunda*, and indeed on several aspects of horticulture generally. As resources, from hothouse fuel to horticulturalists, were redirected towards war efforts in the early 20th century, botanical pursuits understandably declined. It is unsurprising that entanglements of nomenclature and identification ensued, though the scale of the confusion for some *Passiflora* approaches the level of botanical farce.

The long-cultivated species *P. kermesina* was lost, making it impossible to repeat the cross that gave rise to *P. hybrida floribunda*. It was not to enter collections again until its rediscovery in the wild in 2001.

*P. × kewensis* was another apparent casualty. However, its name was erroneously transferred to an entirely different plant (King et al. 2007). It has been noted that the name *P. × kewensis* has been applied to at least three different plants represented by six specimens held at the Kew Herbarium dated between 1898 and 1968 (King et al. 2002). The four specimens with the most recent dates are of a single hybrid cultivar that is today known as *P. 'Kew Gardens'*.

The earliest Kew Herbarium specimen (**Fig. 7**) includes the labels “*Passiflora kewensis* (*kermesina* × *caerulea*)” and “Temperate House 1898” (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew 1899). It comprises a specimen assumed to be the original *P. × kewensis* because of its early date. The specimen is contemporaneous with formal exhibition of *P. × kewensis* at the Royal Horticultural Society’s International Conference in 1899 (Wilks 1900). The 1898 specimen has five-lobed leaves and relatively short (2cm) peduncles.

The second-earliest Kew Herbarium specimen (**Fig. 8**) is dated 1906 (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew 1906). Although it bears a modern identification as “*Passiflora × atropurpurea*”, earlier labels read “*raddiana* × *caerulea*”, “Palm H. June 06”, and “*Passiflora kewensis*”. Apparently collected from the Kew Palm House, this plant has three-lobed leaves and longer (6cm) peduncles. Based on morphological similarities, it has been suggested that the modern cultivar, *P. 'Amethyst'*, may correspond to the 1906 Kew Herbarium specimen (King et al. 2002).

Could the 1906 Kew Herbarium specimen be *P. hybrida floribunda*? The longer peduncle length is in general agreement with Macarthur’s original description. Notably, an 1899 account described “*P. hybrida* var. *floribunda*” screening the woodwork lining the walkways of the Kew Temperate House (Mische 1899). With both *P. × kewensis* and *P. hybrida floribunda* apparently growing in the same glasshouse at about the same time, it does not take a great stretch of imagination to envisage confusion between the two.

Even without the Kew connection, the wide distribution of *P. hybrida floribunda* raises the possibility that the plant survived to the present day.



Figure 7 (top): The 1898 Kew Herbarium specimen (K000994406)

Figure 8 (bottom): The 1906 Kew Herbarium specimen (K000994405)





9a

*P. hybrida floribunda* is a highly plausible candidate for *P. 'Amethyst'*

The name *P. 'Amethyst'* was first used by Dr. John Vanderplank in 1983 for commercial sale of a purple-flowered *Passiflora* variety he obtained from London nursery owner Don Prior, who had himself grown and distributed the plant for years and in great quantities. Mr. Prior marketed the plant under the name “purple passion flower” and suggested to Vanderplank that it might be the species, *P. amethystina* Mikan. Confusion of *P. 'Amethyst'* with *P. amethystina* has been described elsewhere (King et al. 2002). Vanderplank realized that Prior’s variety was distinct from this species and was likely a hybrid, and coined the new name *P. 'Amethyst'* to reduce confusion (Vanderplank, personal communication).



9b

On the continent, the plant that came to be known as *P. 'Amethyst'* was often labelled *P. violacea*, leading to confusion with the hybrid *P. × violacea*. The species name *P. violacea* Vell was used as a synonym for *P. amethystina* Mikan, leading to further confusion between these three plants (King et al. 2002).



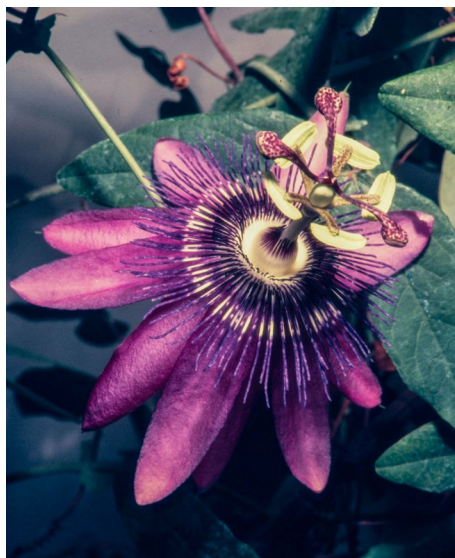
9c

Photographic slides by the late Emil Kugler establish that a plant seemingly identical to *P. 'Amethyst'* was growing at the botanical gardens in Vienna (**Fig. 9a, b**) and Graz (**Fig. 9c**) in 1970. Kugler later photographed the same plant in Munich in 1984 (**Fig. 9d, e**) (Ulmer and MacDougal 2004; King 2000). Kugler labelled his slides “*P. × kewensis*”, though it seems unlikely that such an identification could have been made at the time the photograph was taken.



9d

Any candidate for *P. 'Amethyst'* would ideally be widespread in order to account for the multiple early sightings of identical plants in a variety of locations across Europe and the UK. Such a candidate would also have to pre-date the loss of *P. kermesina* to cultivation. *P. hybrida floribunda* fulfills these criteria. Allowing for some breeder exaggeration regarding flower size, Macarthur’s original description of his cultivar is consistent with *P. 'Amethyst'*, and the latter’s resemblance to the 1860 illustration by Bateman is striking.



9e

9a & b: Plants growing at the Botanical Gardens in Vienna in 1970

9c: Plant growing at the Botanical Gardens of the University of Graz in 1970

9d & e: Plants growing at the Botanical Garden, Munich-Nymphenburg in 1984

*P. hybrida floribunda* could also factor into the history of *P. 'Lavender Lady'*, an American cultivar later observed to be indistinguishable from *P. 'Amethyst'* (King and Frank 2003). Direct evidence for the continued existence of *P. hybrida floribunda* in the United States is currently lacking beyond 1876 nursery offerings. There is, however, mention of an “old variety; purple flowers” in the 1894-95 nursery catalogue offerings of A. N. Kinsman & Co. 1895 of Austin, Minnesota.

## Summary

On sending his *Passiflora* cultivars to England in 1849, William Macarthur remarked, “If you consider them to be worth attention be good enough to name them as Camden hybrids.” Sadly, the origin of this plant that travelled around the globe was forgotten, whether due to distance, change of name, or the fact that one recipient nursery, Loddiges, wound down its operations in the early 1850s.

The present study establishes that a *Passiflora* hybrid initially named *P. floribunda* was derived from a cross of *P. kermesina* × *P. caerulea* in New South Wales by Sir William Macarthur. It was sent to England at least twice in 1849. A purple-flowered variety of the same attributed parentage, variously named as *P. floribunda*, *P. hybrida floribunda*, and *P. hybrida* var. *floribunda* was commercially sold and well-known in horticultural circles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Masters’ observations of this plant increase certainty as to its ascribed parentage and to its identification as the Macarthur hybrid.

It is suggested that William Macarthur’s hybrid may persist in modern collections under the name *P. 'Amethyst'*.

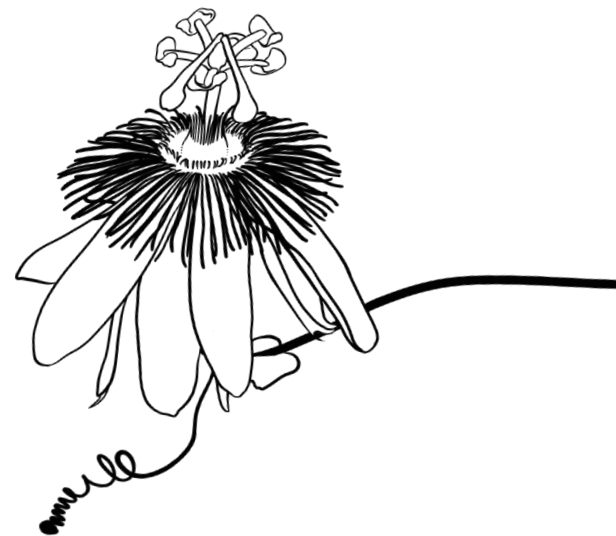
The present study is constrained by the scope of digitized records available online. A full review of paper records may solidify the proposed link between *P. hybrida floribunda* and *P. 'Amethyst'*, while genetic comparison of cultivated *P. 'Amethyst'* to the 1906 Kew Herbarium specimen may connect two plants in this story definitively.

## Acknowledgements

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## Figure Credits and Notes

1. Photo by Markus Varga
2. Scanned image from the State Library of New South Wales  
<https://search.sl.nsw.gov.au/permalink/f/1cvjue2/ADLIB110107285>
3. Scanned image from the State Library of New South Wales  
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4. Scanned image from the State Library of New South Wales  
<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/digital/DVMMKBmoOa8rP>
5. Bateman was known for leaving elements of his illustrations intentionally incomplete, as is the case with the faint pencil drawing bottom right. Illustration from the National Gallery of Victoria  
<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/30194/>
6. Scanned image from Macarthur Family Papers, State Library of New South Wales  
<https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/digital/wopgp4ArvjqpB>
- 7 & 8. © Board of Trustees of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
9. Photographic slides by Emil Kugler. Colouration is affected by use of film and flash photography





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