

Carové's Giant Dragonfly: What's in a name?

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Introduction

Uropetala carovei (White 1843) is a species of dragonfly (Odonata) endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand. Commonly called the Bush Giant Dragonfly, Carové's Giant Dragonfly, or by its Māori name, kapokapowai¹, is New Zealand's largest dragonfly. The wingspan can extend up to 130 mm, with a body length of up to 95 mm. Found throughout most of New Zealand, this dragonfly is a remarkable predator known for their quick flight which allows them to snatch prey and eat them while on the wing (Marinov & Ashbee 2019).

But where does the name Carové come from, for which the dragonfly is named, both in the species name and common name? This is the tale of multiple individuals, countries, and one name.

Collection of holotype

The first specimen of *U. carovei* was collected by Dr Andrew Sinclair (Fig. 1a), a surgeon for the Royal Navy, and later convict ships to Australia (White in Dieffenbach 1843). Dr Sinclair was a well-regarded collector, who regularly collected natural history specimens. He presented these specimens to the British Museum, where they would be described by taxidermists in their Zoological department. In 1841, Sinclair visited the Bay of Islands, where he met up with the missionary William Colenso and a young Joseph Dalton Hooker who was assistant surgeon on H.M.S

¹ There are at least six different recorded Māori names associated with our larger species of dragonflies. Kapokapowai and kapowai are the most commonly used in the literature, and means "water snatcher". This could allude to the water dwelling naiads which has a long extendable jaw that shoots out to snatch their prey. It could also allude to the ovipositing behaviour of some dragonflies (such as *Procordulia* species but not *Uropetala*) where females scoop water droplets to lay their eggs in them and then flick them away. It should be noted that the origin of these names is not well established, and some authors have promoted one over the other without real reason. Over time, certain names may have also been used to refer to multiple dragonfly species when historically they may have been used for one genus. This is an area which warrants more research.

Erebus Ross's Antarctic Expedition. Together, they took several botanical trips from which Sinclair amassed a large collection of shells, corals, sponges, crabs, spiders, cicadas, butterflies, and dragonflies (Molloy 1990). This collection was subsequently presented to the British Museum and used for scientific research.

Description of specimen

Johann Karl Ernst Dieffenbach (more commonly known as Ernst Dieffenbach) was a German naturalist, geologist and physician (Fig. 1b). Born in Giessen, Germany in 1811, Dieffenbach made his way to London in 1837, eventually befriending the likes of Charles Darwin, Charles Lyell and Richard Owen through his publications and translation work. From 1839 to 1841, Dieffenbach was employed as a naturalist by the New Zealand Company and embarked on voyages around New Zealand, documenting flora, fauna, geology, geography and ethnology as he travelled (Godley 2004). By 1842, Dieffenbach had returned to London, and then published his notes in an 1843 book titled '*Travels in New Zealand*'. The last part of the second volume of Dieffenbach's '*Travels*' includes a list of all the animals of New Zealand at the time, which was compiled by John Edward Gray, Keeper of Natural History at the British Museum. Throughout this list, Gray and his assistants George Robert Gray, Edward Doubleday and Adam White added descriptions of any new species found. It is in this book that we find the species description of Carové's dragonfly, done by Adam White (1817-1878) (Fig. 1c).



Figure 1. a. Dr Andrew Sinclair, b. Ernst Dieffenbach, c. Adam White, d. Friedrich Wilhelm Carové, e. Sarah Austin. Images out of copyright.

Carové's dragonfly (Fig. 2) is described in this volume as fauna specimen number 97 on page 281-282. It is listed under order Neuroptera with the notes that:

“Dr Sinclair brought five species of Dragon-flies from New Zealand: two of these are Agrionideous; the largest is described below.”

The first description was made by Adam White 1843 who named it *Petalura carovéi*. As part of the description, the last few sentences read:

“Those who have read ‘The Story without an End’, translated by Sarah Austin from the German of F.W. Carové, and illustrated so beautifully by W. Harvey, will know why I have given the above name to this fine large Dragon-fly.”

Adam White was evidently a fan of the tale and felt he could honour it in this new species of dragonfly. However, in the species description, the explanation for the choice of name has been left as an enigma, unless you also know the tale and understand the reference.

Species namesake

Friedrich Wilhelm Carové (June 20, 1789 – March 18, 1852) (Fig. 1d) was a German philosopher, lawyer and writer. He was mostly known for his works about politics, state and religion, but was also passionate about German art and literature, especially old Germanic folklore tales. The Story without an End was first published in German in 1830 titled as ‘Kinderleben Oder Das Märchen Ohne Ende’ (Children's Lives or the Fairy Tale Without an End). It was translated in English by renowned translator Sarah Austin (nee Taylor) (1793 – 1867) (Fig. 1e) in 1834, as a request from Austin's daughter who loved the tale in German and wished for other children to be able to appreciate it. The 1934 version was illustrated by William Harvey (Fig. 3), while the second version in 1879 was illustrated by Elizabeth Vere Boyle. Sarah Austin's translation made Carové's story incredibly popular in English speaking countries at the time, with thirteen editions issued in England and eighteen in America. Comparatively, Carové only ever had one edition in Germany.

In the story, a child goes on an idyllic adventure through the natural world, encountering various creatures who tell the child fantastical stories. These stories serve as moral lessons for both the child and the readers, very much in the way of fairytales. The child's favourite guest was a blue dragonfly

with whom it would have breakfast. In the story, the dragonfly comes to the aid of the child when it is lost in the forest. The dragonfly leads the child to a cave so it can spend the night there and then calls on her fellow fireflies so that the child would have company.



Figure 2. Holotype specimen of *Uropetala carovei* collected by Dr Sinclair and described by Adam White, held at the Natural History Museum, London UK. CC-BY-4.0 The Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London.

Showing how integral the dragonfly is to the tale, the last line of chapter twelve reads:

“The dragon-fly flew on
before and showed him the way as far as the outermost verge
of the wood, whence the Child could espy his own little hut,
and then flew away to her playfellows.”

Carové was alive when this dragonfly from the other side of the world was named after him, however it is unknown if he was ever made aware of this remarkable honour.



Figure 3. Illustration by William Harvey featured in the first translated version of *The Story without an End* by Sarah Austin. Image out of copyright.

References

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