

Phylogeny of *Escallonia*

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I work on *Escallonia*, a member of the plant family Escalloniaceae, that includes around 40 species of herbs, shrubs and trees found throughout the Andes, the south Atlantic Forest in Brazil, Juan Fernández Island and, remarkably, La Réunion in the Indian Ocean. Although *Escallonia* is clearly defined by both vegetative and reproductive characters, it is considered taxonomically complex and there has been much disagreement over how many species it contains and uncertainty over its phylogeny. My research integrates genetic, morphological and spatial analyses to illuminate decisions on species delimitation and to shed some light on the biological processes generating and maintaining molecular, morphological and ecological diversity in this genus.

Currently, I am reconstructing a complete phylogeny of *Escallonia* using molecular sequence data from different loci. This phylogeny will allow me not only to identify evolutionary lineages, but it will also provide an indirect record of the speciation events that have led to the extant diversity in this genus. By combining this phylogeny with information on geographical distribution, ecology and explicit analyses of morphological variation, I will reassess species limits and will investigate the mechanisms associated with the diversification of *Escallonia* in the highlands of South America and its dispersal to remote oceanic islands. With financial support from the **Whitney R. Harris World Ecology Center (Christensen Fund Scholarship in Plant Conservation)** and other sources, I have been able to do field work in Colombia, Chile and will soon collect in Brazil. These funds have also allowed me to start work in the molecular laboratory and to visit different herbaria to study *Escallonia* collections.

