SEB’s 2010 Annual Meeting Will Gather World-Renowned Speakers in Xalapa, Veracruz, México, June 6 – 10, 2010

The SEB Annual Meeting, which will be held in Xalapa, Veracruz from June 6 to June 10, 2010, will host a series of national and international guest lectures focused on the changing paradigms in Agrobiodiversity in the context of community conservation, food security, ethnobotany, and ancient systems of food production. Below are brief bios of some of the speakers.

Gary J. Martin—Global Diversity Foundation
He has been involved in conservation and ethnobotanical work for over twenty-five years, starting with a gap year in 1980 in which he carried out fieldwork in Mexico. He holds a B.S. in botany from Michigan State University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley. As Director of The Global Diversity Foundation, he has launched an international program of research, training and social action that focuses on the challenges facing agricultural, biological, and cultural diversity.

Anabel Ford—The Maya Forest Alliance
As a distinguished Maya archaeologist, she has decoded the ancient Maya landscape by combining archaeological survey with traditional knowledge. Living in the forest and relying on its bounty, Ford gained admiration for the local knowledge of the Maya forest as a garden. When she discovered El Pilar, a major Maya city linking Belize and Guatemala, she envisioned a place where discovery of the monuments would be appreciated in the context of the traditional knowledge of the people living in the region today. Working closely with Maya farmers, she proposes that the Maya forest is an archaeological artifact and that traditional land use accounts for ancient Maya settlement patterns. She brings her extensive field experience and broad inquisitive mind to demystify the Maya.

Victor Toledo—Cieco-UNAM
He is a Mexican biologist who has combined his scientific background with social studies of economy, politics, agrarian cultures, and rural sociology. For more than 20 years, Toledo has studied the interaction between indigenous rural communities and the maintenance and use of biodiversity. He is an ethnecology expert; his studies and theoretical contributions to the understanding of the relationship between indigenous cultures and nature have international recognition. He also has contributed to the development of a new discipline, political ecology where he connects thought on “postnormal science” popularized by Funtowicz and Ravetz.

Martí Boada Juncà—The Autonomous University of Barcelona
Geographer, naturalist, and doctor in Environmental Sciences, he is a full professor and researcher at the Department of Geography and at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA) of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, UAB). His main research fields are environmental change, urban and forest biodiversity, environmental communication. He is a member of the Spanish Committee of UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), the Education and Communication Commission of the IUCN (The World Conservation Union), and the Global 500 Forum of the United Nations Environment Programme.
Notes from the Field

I was walking yesterday and, although the ground in Colorado has been covered by snow since October, the sky was radiant blue and the sun was setting at 6 PM as I returned home. So things are looking towards spring and ultimately summer. The thought of being in Mexico is melting the ice that surrounds me and I look forward to the creative conversations with colleagues and their innovative thoughts about plants and people. Hope to see you there. Register at: http://www.econbot.org/_organization_/index.php?sm=07|meetings_by_year/2010

The Council is spending most of its time updating and streamlining our Society’s guidelines. They are preparing new bylaws for you to review soon, and a procedural policy manual for our governing members. You can read about these in the article on the Mid-Year Council meeting that was held in at our office in St. Louis in January. The Council members, with Economic Botany Editor Bob Voeks, continue to improve our esteemed journal by raising its impact by soliciting papers worthy of our readership. Thinking of submitting your paper? Here is how to submit it online: http://www.editorialmanager.com/ecbo/.

The Nominating Committee is preparing our 2010 ballot so let us know if you have suggestions but, more importantly, please vote when you receive it.

Remember, as well, that there are many ways to get involved and make the Society robust. The committees are a great way to participate and you can always check in with our active President Eve Emshwiller, president@econbot.org.

As always, our students are active. They will be selling T-Shirts at the 2010 meeting in Xalapa. They are poised to meet and plan their annual projects. I look forward to their scientific program, which initiates new ideas for fieldwork and collaboration. Take a look on page 10.

Finally, this issue is dedicated to the memory of dear friends and colleagues we have recently lost. SEB is a mature Society that has had the opportunity to laugh and study with colleagues, building friendships as they pass through life, and such losses become inevitable at our stage of growth. We will miss Carlos.

Hasta luego,

SEB Mid-Year Council Meeting

The council spent several hours discussing the Journal quality and its relationship with the NYBG and Springer, our publisher. The result of the in-depth discussion is that some of the Council members will develop mutually beneficial agreements. Stay tuned for the future member benefits.

Another major discussion was the changes in the bylaws. Heather McMillen, our Council Secretary, has done a tremendous job simplifying the bylaws so they can be relevant for a longer period of time as the Society evolves. The proposed changes streamline committees and simplify the guidelines for governing the Society. She has also developed a manual that outlines the responsibilities of Council members so that upon taking office, each Council member is informed about his or her commitments. Such protocol procedures, long kept by past President Susan Verhoek, had fallen out of practice. Revitalizing this knowledge will catalyze more attention to specific duties and we will see a more active council.

The journal report by our Editor, Bob Voeks, emphasized the on-time issues, the need for continued quality manuscripts, the call for more review articles, and the need for reviewers who can return copy in a timely manner. Contact him with your interests and your manuscripts, especially if you are a Fulling award recipient.

All other aspects of the Society are sound and progressing well, so join us for the annual meeting in Xalapa.
Past Presidents Interviews

Interview with Brad Bennett, Ph.D., Past President
Submitted by Lisa Offringa loffringa@nybg.org

Brad Bennett was the President in 2004. Ph.D. student Lisa Offringa, CUNY Ph.D. program in Plant Sciences, Institute of Economic Botany at The New York Botanical Garden recently interviewed him for this column of the Newsletter. I hope all of you are as inspired by Dr. Bennett’s comments as Lisa. Thank you, Brad, for all of your dedication to SEB and especially to your students.

1. What was your inspiration for studying botany and economic botany?

My interest in botany developed at an early age, my avocation for ethnobotany developed later. Growing up in southern Florida, I spent much of my time fishing and exploring in the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp, and fishing and diving on Florida’s coral reefs. I was, therefore, interested in plants and the environment. By my senior year in high school, I had become concerned with the rampant environmental destruction in the state. In college, I contemplated majoring in every subject that I took, but I was particularly drawn to field-based courses in the sciences. I quickly abandoned plants to study environmental law, instead majoring in biology, geology, or geography. Deciding which graduate discipline to pursue was difficult. I was torn between ecology and systematics, biogeography, geomorphology, and soil science, but eventually settled on the first. My dissertation research focused on the evolutionary ecology of Bromeliaceae. While conducting fieldwork in Peru, I collected ethnobotanical data as a side project but, at that time, had no interest in pursuing ethnobotany exclusively. After completing my dissertation, I accepted a NYBG postdoctoral position to conduct ethnobotanical work in Ecuador. Even then, I had not committed to a career in ethnobotany, but quickly became enamored with the discipline for several reasons. One, it required a broad array of skills that mirrored my undergraduate academic interests. Two, unlike my dissertation topic on the evolution of epiphytism in Bromeliaceae, ethnobotany was of broad interest both in the scientific community and among the public. Three, I found that the results of ethnobotanical research had immediate applications, many of which could benefit the people with whom I worked last, but by no means least. I had an excellent post-doc mentor in Mike Balick, Ph.D., Vice President and Chair, Botanical Science Research and Training, Director and Phylecogy Curator, Institute of Economic Botany at The New York Botanical Garden, who provided near unlimited academic freedom while offering advice and guidance as needed.

2. Were there significant experiences or events that shaped your education and career? From these, what would you recommend to students to prepare them for life as an economic botanist?

My post-doctoral experience with Mike Balick at NYBG was probably the greatest influence on my academic career. I must also acknowledge former SEB president Sir Ghillean Prance, Ph.D. (Ian), who was Director of the Institute of Economic Botany at The New York Botanical Garden, at the time. Ian acted as friend and mentor during my undergraduate days. I applied to the NYBG position in large part because of my respect for Ian.

For students interested in careers in economic botany, I recommend that they find a good mentor and that they attend the SEB annual meetings. If students do not have a passion for plants and a passion for people, economic botany is the wrong discipline for them.

3. What were some of the more difficult experiences you had as a researcher and how did you resolve them?

Like anyone who has conducted fieldwork in the tropics, I have had my share of adventures. These include being caught in uprisings, being held at gunpoint, brushes with venomous reptiles, questionable cuisine, terrifying transportation, and so on. None of those issues were particularly difficult to endure—they are all part of the field experience. What was difficult was to be away from my children for six-months at a time. From the birth of my oldest girls, twins Elizabeth and Rebecca, and their sixth birthday, I was in the field for a total of three years. This was before cell phones and reliable communication in most parts of the world, and I often was out of contact for many months. My one successful means of coping with the separation was to keep pictures of them in my field books. In retrospect, I’m not sure I would make that sacrifice again. With my youngest daughter, I’ve not been away for more than two months at a time and then only once a year.

4. As a teacher, mentor, and advisor, what important principles do you want to impart to your students?

This is a difficult question to answer. Because of its breadth, ethnobotanical research can employ methodology from a plethora of disciplines. Nonetheless, I would suggest that understanding plant systematics is fundamental to most ethnobotanical studies. These include collecting, pressing, and identifying specimens, understanding phylogenetic relationships among groups, and dealing with synonymy and nomenclature. Ethnobotanists often need to be better at taxonomy than taxonomists because they deal with incomplete and partial plant samples. Linguistic and ethnographic skills would rank as other fundamental tools. For medicinal plant studies, analytical skills in phytochemistry and bioassays are requisite.

5. What tools or technologies, both classic and modern, do you find most useful in your studies?

I’ll address two issues. One is the rapid loss of language, and with it the loss of traditional knowledge, along with global loss of vegetation. Unless the knowledge of elders is recorded soon, it will be lost forever. To record that knowledge requires that the elders have access to the same resources that their ancestors used. Whether that knowledge has any practical application is irrelevant. Each time a language becomes extinct, along with the

Continued on page 10
Carlos Ramírez-Sosa

Submitted by Jamie Whitacre—
jamie.s.whitacre@gmail.com, with help
from Carlos Ramírez-Sosa's students Jessica
Peak & John Trentini and, of course, Carlos.

Carlos Ramírez-Sosa told us, “I became a
scientist thanks to what I see as two ac-
cidents. When I was eight years old, I joined the
Boy Scouts. And then, when I was in seventh
grade, my father bought me a microscope set.”
Carlos lived with his family in El Salvador, the
smallest country in Central America. “Of the
two, I think being a Boy Scout was the major
influence, though the microscope got me
interested in science as a whole.”

“I was a scout for ten years. Along with my
troop, I traveled all over the country, learning
about the natural world and how to survive
in it. Among the things we had to learn about
were edible plants and medicinal plants in the
wild.” To achieve the highest rank, Carlos had
to spend seven days in the forest, alone except
for one other high-ranking scout, and survive
without any food from town. “We learned
how to make bread from plants in the forest
and what plants to use for a stomachache and
other such problems.”

Carlos left the scouts, and El Salvador, just
after finishing high school in 1980 when he
moved with his family to the United States. He
has maintained his connection, however, and
serves as an environmental counselor whenever
his work and studies bring him back to his
home country. He has also been named the
Honorary Associate Curator of the National
Herbarium there.

Carlos was living in New York City when it
was time to go to college. “I knew I wanted
to become a scientist, but I wasn’t sure what kind.
Because environmental conditions are so bad in El
Salvador, I thought I wanted to work on some kind
of environmental issue, so my interest was pointed
in that direction.” El Salvador is the most densely
populated country in Central America, Carlos told
us. “It is also the most deforested. Only 5 percent
of the country is forested and only about 2 percent
is protected by the government,” he said.

Carlos went to Lehman College in New York City,
where he met a plant ecologist named Dwight
Kincaid. “He really helped me focus on what I
wanted to do. I worked as a volunteer in his lab
for three years, about 30 hours a week, and I was
able to do real research and present it at scientific
meetings.” Carlos went on for his master’s degree at
Michigan State University, where he studied global
warming and urban trees. While at Michigan, he
helped develop an educational program called
Tree Amigos. “It was for fifth graders. Students
in Michigan learned about tropical forests and
students in Costa Rica learned about temperate
forests,” Carlos explained.

Carlos completed his doctorate in biology at the
City University of New York (CUNY) in 2001
after which he taught general biology, ecology,
ethnobotany, plant systematics, ethnobiology,
and tropical ecology at St. Lawrence University
in New York and several courses at Indiana Univer-
sity. A St. Lawrence student wrote, “Carlos had a
passion and zest for science that was inspired all
around him. While doing research with Carlos
in El Salvador, he planted a seed in my soul that
has become the root of my scientific curiosity.
His family, friends, and colleagues should know
that he will live on and endure in my own spirit
of adventure and discovery.”

Carlos told us about an inventory he once did of a
section of forest in El Salvador. “It took me a whole
year, and I inventoried three hectares. Most people
do only one hectare. My first site was a 25-minute
walk from the nearest town. It was very difficult
during the rainy season because there were a lot of
mosquitoes, and it got very dark in the forest, and
it was hard to dry specimens. Also, my plot was
on a slope and the ground was very slippery. One
day I fell down about 40 times. My second site
was in a more distant area, a three-hour walk, so
I had to camp out there. Sometimes I’d ask myself
if it was worth it, but the answer was always ‘Yes.’
I had this drive and I learned to enjoy it, because
I care about science and I want to learn and to
provide something to the people in El Salvador.”

“The questions I am interested in apply to conserv-
ation, politics, and cultural issues. I believe it is
important to take a multidisciplinary approach.
All of these issues are interconnected, and if we
do not look at the larger picture, we lose sight of
that connection and everything suffers as a result,”
Carlos said.

I first met Carlos in 2005 through his ethnobotany
field course run by the Institute for Tropical Ecol-
yogy (ITEC) in Bocas del Toro, Panama. It was
immediately clear that Carlos was passionate about
ethnobotany and an inspiring teacher who shared
his enthusiasm with his students. Carlos kept us
on our toes as we developed skills in ecological
field methods; weaved through Costaceae stands
dense as corn fields; trekked up steep, slippery,
muddy slopes; and visited communities both on
the island and in remote sites on the mainland.
It was an unforgettable experience due to Carlos’s
inexhaustible enthusiasm for the natural world
and his commitment to studying nature using a
multidisciplinary approach.

Most recently, Carlos served on the faculty at
Southern Connecticut State University as assis-
tant professor of biology. Carlos was conducting
botanical and ethnobotanical research in Central
America and South America, focusing on ecol-
y, plant systematics, and documenting the
loss of traditional knowledge. According to the
Department of Biology at Southern Connecticut
University, Carlos “was instrumental in shaping
the future of the Biology Department’s Liberal
Education Program known as the LEP, as well as
serving as its assessment coordinator.” He also
independently served as the Chairman of Science
and Research for the organization Salvadorans in
the World and as an advisor to local communi-
ties in El Salvador regarding the importance of
environmental stewardship.

Carlos passed away on Jan. 18, 2010, in San
Salvador. He was 43.
The Charles B. Heiser, Jr. Mentor Award

Aloha Everyone,

It is time to honor our mentors! Please consider nominating a mentor who has inspired your ethnobotanical endeavors for the Charles B. Heiser, Jr. Mentor Award by emailing a 500-word max letter to me at WeissL@hawaii.edu by April 1, 2010. Please on for more information.

Aloha, Laura

The Student Committee of SEB initiated this Award in 2007 to recognize outstanding economic botanists who have substantially impacted the training and professional development of economic botany and ethnobotany students. The Award is named in honor of Charles B. Heiser, Jr., Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Indiana University who is most known for his hallmark research on the origins of agriculture. He is a past president of the SEB (1978) as well as a Distinguished Economic Botanist (1984). Under his direction and mentorship 29 students received their Ph.D.

This Award, chosen by current students, spotlights dedicated educators who foster the development of the field by example and through student mentoring. It acknowledges mentors who are experienced, knowledgeable, trustworthy friends, counselors, and teachers. At the annual SEB conference in June, the 2010 Mentor will be recognized at the banquet on the last day of the conference.

For more information, visit http://econbot.org/about/index.php?sm=06|awards_heiser

Nominate your mentor!

• Mentors must be SEB members who have not previously accepted the award.

• Students who nominate a mentor must be current students or recent graduates (within 3 years) who are current SEB members.

• The nominations letters can range from a short paragraph to 500 words, and explain reasons for nominating a mentor. Please send via email to Laura Shiel [WeissL@hawaii.edu] by April 1, 2010.

In Memoriam

A short commemorative video about Carlos can be found on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqslD_EQea&feature=player_embedded

Some Selected Publications


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“The Pepper Lady” Jean Andrews Dies
By Michael Barnes
Friday, January 8, 2010, 02:32 PM

Jean Andrews, “the Pepper Lady” — scientist, gardener, explorer, artist and cook — passed away Thursday in her home at age 86.

The best-selling Texas author of books on shells, bluebonnets, and hot peppers, Andrews was a glamorous character who popularized the cultivation and use of capsicums.

“She pioneered the field just as peppers were getting hot internationally,” said former American-Statesman food editor Kitty Crider. “And she was fearless.”

“She was colorful — oh my goodness she was colorful,” said Theresa May, Director of the University of Texas Press, which sold more than 40,000 copies of her books on shells and peppers. May recalled a time when a UT press employee visited Andrews, finding road kill lined up in front of her house.

“She was doing some kind of experiment,” May said. “She was so intrepid and adventurous. And she had a voracious intellect.”

Andrews, known at the UT School of Human Ecology as “Dr. Jean,” was born in Kingsville in 1923. After graduating from the University of Texas and Texas A&M (now Texas A&M-Kingsville), she earned her Ph.D. from the University of North Texas in 1976.

The world, however, was her classroom. She traveled to China, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, India, Burma, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iran, and Oman. She camped in Ethiopia, rode a donkey through China, traveled with the Bedouin.

One of her memorable phrases: “Well, I can’t stand to have anything if I don’t know all about it and one thing led to another.”

Andrews began collecting seashells in 1959 and learned to scuba dive, then explored waters of the

Continued on page 8
SEB’s Annual Meeting: 2010

Miguel Alexiades—University of Kent
He has a Ph.D. in Plant Sciences (City University of New York) and was trained as an ethnobotanist at The New York Botanical Garden’s Institute of Economic Botany. He has worked extensively over the past two decades in Amazonian Peru and Bolivia on a number of applied and academic research projects in the fields of health care, human-environment relations, local knowledge, and community development. His theoretical interests revolve around the “new ecologies”—notably historical, political, and symbolic ecology, with a focus on cultural landscapes as well as indigenous knowledge and its relationship to the environment, social change, and globalization.

Call for Papers
Call for Papers is still open for the oral and poster sessions in the areas of agrobiodiversity, community conservation, ethnobotany of economic plants, food self-sufficiency, and ancient systems of food production. Also, there will be several sessions dedicated to contributed papers.

Field Trips
Along with the academic program, a mixture of unique field trips are available to visit the main archeological sites of the state and get to know the local attractions around Xalapa city. For information Sandra Mesa Ortiz sandra_luzmx@yahoo.com.mx; Tel/Fax +52 (228) 8108263 ; Tel. +52 (228) 8421700 ext. 12670

Important Reminders:

Information about fees, accommodations, and local information can be found at: http://www.econbot.org. For specific questions: sebmeeting_2010@gmail.com or Valentina Martinez Valdés vamartinez@uv.mx/; valmar_75@hotmail.com

Calendar of Guest Speakers June 2010, Xalapa, Veracruz, México

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Attend the SEB 2010 Xalapa Conference Virtually!

Submitted by Jeanine Pfeiffer—jeanine.pfeiffer@gmail.com—& Valentina Martinez—valmar_75@hotmail.com

Some Council members and meeting coordinators tested a new system for remote access to the 2010 Annual meeting in Xalapa. The test went very well. It was really interesting to see all the tools and possibilities that Elluminate offers.

We tested it with two different cameras, and it worked well with both. We are still resolving some logistic details such as recording and broadcasting the sessions. I think it will be an interesting experience. So if you simply cannot attend in person, please visit us online. Stay tuned for the links.

Webinars
Hundreds of educational institutions are using webinars effectively, including MIT, Harvard, Duke, and California State Universities. Jeanine Pfeiffer, SEB Council Member and a Core Team Member of the Open Science Network (OSN, headquartered at BRIT), is coordinating an effort to broadcast select SEB 2010 Conference sessions as webinars. Jeanine will be working with Xalapa on-site conference committee members, OSN students and teachers, and conference presenters who would like to extend their audience.

Webinars involve a video cam and microphone on site, and require PowerPoint presentations to be pre-loaded. Offsite participants log in from around the world, and follow along in real time. Participants can view and hear presentations, and raise their hands online and ask questions via IM chat or an audio link (or just follow along silently if there is no time allotted for offsite questions). Sessions will be recorded and password protected, and only accessible to SEB members.

If you would like to hold a webinar in your session, please contact Jeanine by calling 707/962-4560 or sending an email to jeanine.pfeiffer@gmail.com. To learn more about how webinars work, visit http://www.elluminate.com/community/

Save travel costs, reduce your carbon footprint, and help our society move into the 21st century!
Open Science Network 2010

Submitted by Pat Harrison pharrison@brit.org

The Open Science Network, funded by the National Science Foundation, is completing its first year of development in its effort to create a new paradigm in science education through the continual exchange of ethnobiology educational resources across institutional and international borders using web-based technology. Using an “open-philosophy” approach, the project encourages educators and students (including non-traditional) to generate ethnobiology curricula and participate in open-group evaluations. Progress has been made in posting curricula to the website, while help is needed in evaluating the materials and building the network.

Members of the Society of Economic Botany are encouraged to contribute to the project this spring and attend the second annual meeting on June 5 in Xalapa prior to the SEB meeting. There are several ways to get involved in the project and become eligible for travel funds to attend the meeting. For more information, visit the WiserEarth website at http://www.wiserearth.org/group/opensci_ethnobiology and the project work site at http://sites.google.com/site/ethnobiologycenter/about-the-nsf-open-science-network-grant.

Smithsonian Botanical Symposium

Food for Thought: 21st Century Perspectives on Plants and People
24-25 September 2010
National Museum of Natural History
In collaboration with the U.S. Botanic Garden

The Smithsonian Botanical Symposium, hosted by the Departments of Botany and Anthropology, will examine the 21st-century transformation of the study of interactions between plants and people. The invited speakers will cover a wide range of topics: from the role molecular biology now has in elucidating crop domestication to the ways in which peoples across myriad ecosystems interact with specific plants and landscapes. The Botanical Symposium is one of many activities planned to celebrate the Centennial of the National Museum of Natural History.

The Symposium is supported by the Cuatrecasas Family Foundation.

Information and registration will be posted in late April at http://botany.si.edu/sbs/
Please send your questions to sbs@si.edu.

Crosspollination

The Irula: The Great Ethnobotanists of Southern India

Submitted by Kristyn Schuller
kristynschuller@gmail.com

Kristyn Schuller, now a UH student, wrote this summary of her fieldwork when working with ethnobotany students from Valencia Community College in Orlando, Florida in 2008. Until 24 years ago, the Irula tribe was one of the poorest and most illiterate communities in southern India in the state of Tamil Nadu. At one time, the Irula were a nomadic people. They were known as the great snake and rat catchers of India until deforestation, government seizure, and development of native lands made their lifestyle impossible. Without skills useful in the developing economy, they became marginalized in society, were not even allowed a voice in state politics involving self-governance, and were denied all benefits and services of the state.

In 1986, the Irula Tribal Women’s Welfare Society (ITWWS) was established to promote literacy and conservation of culture. The organization is run almost entirely by women, a rarity in India. A year later, their Tree and Herb nursery was founded and continues to be one of the most important endeavors of ITWWS. Due to deforestation, many of their medicinal plants became rare and difficult to find. The nursery houses the largest collection in southern India, featuring over 180 different species of medicinal herbs, 80 different tree species, and 650 types of seeds, which are stored in their seed bank. The role of the seed bank is to not only preserve their important plants, but to deter over-cultivating in the wild, as the Irula are deeply connected to and respectful of the forest.

The ITWWS is important commercially as well as culturally. They promote healthy living through a close relationship with plants and employ tribe members from over 100 villages to take care of the nursery and make medicines that are readily available in their community and across southern India. They also employ a traditional doctor.

The Irula are slowly being recognized outside of India for their knowledge of plants. The Biodiversity Institute in Canada has worked with the Irula people for their remedies in treating diabetes using the plant Gymnema sylvestre (Asclepiadaceae) among many others.

In just 23 years, a tribe of people once considered untouchables have accomplished an incredible feat. They have successfully established a paradigm of cultural conservation, empowerment of women, and are now recognized in southern India for their great knowledge of medicinal plants.

For more information visit http://www.itw-wsindia.org/

Kristyn is President of the Ethnobiology Society at the University of Hawai’i and encourages all of you to send her information about visiting and offering a seminar on your fieldwork or sponsor a group with whom you are working to visit the UH Ethnobiology Society.
In Memoriam

Claude Lévi-Strauss, 100, Dies; Altered Western Views of the “Primitive”

Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist who transformed Western understanding of what was once called “primitive man” and who towered over the French intellectual scene in the 1960s and 1970s, has died at 100.

His son Laurent said Mr. Lévi-Strauss died of cardiac arrest Friday at his home in Paris. He was buried the same day in the village of Lignerolles, in the Côte-d’Or region southeast of Paris, where he had a country home.

“He had expressed the wish to have a discreet and sober funeral, with his family, in his country house,” his son said. “He was attached to this place; he liked to take walks in the forest, and the cemetery where he is now buried is just on the edge of this forest.”

A powerful thinker, Mr. Lévi-Strauss was an avatar of “structuralism,” a school of thought in which universal “structures” were believed to underlie all human activity, giving shape to seemingly disparate cultures and creations. His work had a profound influence even on his critics, of whom there were many.

“People realize he is one of the great intellectual heroes of the 20th century,” Philippe Descola, the chairman of the anthropology department at the Collège de France, said last November in an interview with The New York Times on the centenary of Mr. Levi-Strauss’s birth. Mr. Lévi-Strauss was so revered that at least 25 countries celebrated his 100th birthday.

His legacy is imposing. Mythologiques, his four-volume work about the structure of native mythology in the Americas, attempts nothing less than an interpretation of the world of culture and custom, shaped by analysis of several hundred myths of little-known tribes and traditions. The volumes—The Raw and the Cooked, From Honey to Ashes, The Origin of Table Manners, and The Naked Man, published from 1964 to 1971—challenge the reader with their complex interweaving of theme and detail.

In his analysis of myth and culture, Mr. Lévi-Strauss might contrast imagery of monkeys and jaguars; consider the differences in meaning of roasted and boiled food (cannibals, he suggested, tended to boil their friends and roast their enemies); and establish connections between weird mythological tales and ornate laws of marriage and kinship.

His interpretations of North and South American myths were pivotal in changing Western thinking about so-called primitive societies. He began challenging the conventional wisdom about them shortly after beginning his anthropological research in the 1930s—an experience that became the basis of an acclaimed 1955 book, Tristes Tropiques, a sort of anthropological meditation based on his travels in Brazil and elsewhere.

The accepted view held that primitive societies were intellectually unimaginative and temperamentally irrational, basing their approaches to life and religion on the satisfaction of urgent needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

Mr. Lévi-Strauss rescued his subjects from this limited perspective. Beginning with the Caduveo and Bororo tribes in the Mato Grosso region of Brazil, where he did his first and primary fieldwork, he found among them a dogged quest not just to satisfy material needs but also to understand origins, a sophisticated logic that governed even the most bizarre myths, and an implicit sense of order and design, even among tribes who practiced ruthless warfare.

His work elevated the status of “the savage mind,” a phrase that became the English title of one of his most forceful surveys, La Pensée Sauvage (1962).
In Memoriam
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The world of primitive tribes was fast disappearing, he wrote. From 1900 to 1950, more than 90 tribes and 15 languages had disappeared in Brazil alone. This was another of his recurring themes. He worried about the growth of a “mass civilization,” of a modern “monoculture.” He sometimes expressed exasperated self-disgust with the West and its “own filth, thrown in the face of mankind.”

In this seeming elevation of the savage mind and denigration of Western modernity, he was writing within the tradition of French Romanticism, inspired by the 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom Mr. Lévi-Strauss revered. It was a view that helped build Mr. Lévi-Strauss’s public reputation in the era of countercultural romanticism in the 1960s and 1970s.

In radio talks for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1977 (published as Myths and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture), Mr. Lévi-Strauss demonstrated how a structural examination of myth might proceed. He cited a report that in 17th-century Peru, when the weather became exceedingly cold, a priest would summon all those who had been born feet first, or who had a harelip, or who were twins. They were accused of being responsible for the weather and were ordered to repent, to correct the aberrations. But why these groups? Why harelips and twins?

Mr. Lévi-Strauss cited a series of North American myths that associate twins with opposing natural forces: threat and promise, danger and expectation. One myth, for example, includes a magical hare, a rabbit, whose nose is split in a fight, resulting, literally, in a harelip, suggesting an incipient twinniness. With his injunctions, the Peruvian priest seemed aware of associations between cosmic disorder and the latent powers of twins.

Claude Lévi-Strauss was born on November 28, 1908, in Belgium. From 1927 to 1932, Claude obtained degrees in law and philosophy at the University of Paris, then taught in a local high school, the Lycée Janson de Sailly, where his fellow teachers included Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. He later became a professor of sociology at the French-influenced University of São Paulo in Brazil.

Mr. Lévi-Strauss left teaching in 1937 and devoted himself to fieldwork, returning to France in 1939 for further study. But on the eve of war, he was drafted into the French Army to serve as a liaison with British troops. In Tristes Tropiques, he writes of his “disorderly retreat” from the Maginot Line after Hitler’s invasion of France, fleeing in cattle trucks, sleeping in “sheep folds.”

In 1941, Mr. Lévi-Strauss was invited to become a visiting professor at the New School for Social Research in New York, with help from the Rockefeller Foundation. He called it “the most fruitful period of my life,” spending time in the reading room of the New York Public Library and befriending the distinguished American anthropologist Franz Boas.

He also became part of a circle of artists and surrealists, including Max Ernst, André Breton, and Sartre’s future mistress, Dolores Vanetti. Ms. Vanetti, who shared his “passion for objects,” Mr. Lévi-Strauss said in Conversations, regularly visited an antique shop on Third Avenue in Manhattan that sold artifacts from the Pacific Northwest, leaving Mr. Lévi-Strauss with the “impression that all the essentials of humanity’s artistic treasures could be found in New York.”

After the war, Mr. Lévi-Strauss was so intent on pursuing his studies in New York that he was given the position of cultural attaché by the French government until 1947. On his return to France, he earned a doctorate in letters from the University of Paris in 1948 and was associate curator at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris in 1948 and 1949. His first major book, The Elementary Structures of Kinship, was published in 1949. (Several years later, the jury of the Prix Goncourt, France’s most famous literary award, said that it would have given the prize to Tristes Tropiques, his hybrid of memoir and anthropological travelogue, had it been fiction.)

After the Rockefeller Foundation gave the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris a grant to create a department of social and economic sciences, Mr. Lévi-Strauss became the director of studies at the school, remaining in the post from 1950 to 1974.

Other positions followed. From 1953 to 1960, he served as secretary general of the International Social Science Council at UNESCO. In 1959, he was appointed professor at the Collège de France. He was elected to the French Academy in 1973. By 1960, Mr. Lévi-Strauss had founded L’Homme, a journal modeled on The American Anthropologist.

By the 1980s, structuralism as imagined by Mr. Lévi-Strauss had been displaced by French thinkers who became known as poststructuralists: writers like Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida. They rejected the idea of timeless universals and argued that history and experience were far more important in shaping human consciousness than universal laws.

“French society, and especially Parisian, is glutinous,” Mr. Lévi-Strauss responded. “Every five years or so, it needs to stuff something new in its mouth. And so five years ago it was structuralism, and now it is something else. I practically don’t dare use the word ‘structuralist’ anymore, since it has been so badly deformed. I am certainly not the father of structuralism.”
knowledge of plants embedded in that language, we lose another chapter of human history.

The second issue is the relevance of economic botany. For many in the sciences, economic botany is a quaint little discipline. They are, of course, wrong. As Peter Raven along with several SEB past presidents and board members said, ethnobotany (which I consider synonymous with economic botany) is the science of survival. (Kauai Declaration 2007) There is no other discipline more relevant to humanity. It is our job to preach this message.

7. What have you learned from the people you studied in the Neotropics? In what ways do you think our culture could learn from them?

The main thing that I’ve learned in my research in the Neotropics is that cultures are far more similar to one another than they are different. All humanity shares many basic principles and values. However, I am impressed by the general lack of materialism within many of the cultures that I have studied. I do not believe that this reflects a degree of moral superiority; rather, it flows from their isolation from the “accumulate more stuff mentality” that encompasses most developed societies. Most of the indigenous people I know live full and contented lives without C-Span, iPods, PCs, and cell phones.

8. How has economic botany changed since you were president of the SEB in 2004? Do you have a vision for the society in the future?

I would like to approach the question for a different time frame. Up until a decade or two before I was elected president of SEB, the Society, as reflected in the publications, had a strong interest in food and domestication. The focus of the Society shifted in the 1990s to studies of indigenous cultures and more recently toward ethnobotany. The change is welcome, as long as it does not occur at the expense of ignoring the Society’s past. Studies of traditional management and medicinal plants may be in vogue, but even the discovery of a plant-based cure for AIDS would pale in comparison to the domestication of corn, wheat, or rice. The food supply derived from agriculture based on domesticated plants has been the most important aspect of human evolution and continues to be the most important factor for human survival. Let’s not forget what many of the Society’s founders studied.

As a vision, I would like to see the society grow and diversify in its foci. Domestication should attract crop breeders and agronomists, resource management should attract park managers, and medicinal plants should attract healthcare professionals. The Society for Microbiology annual meetings have attendances of 30,000+, SEB will never have that number, nor would I want meetings that large. Nonetheless, I have no doubt that there are more than 1,000 people (the average SEB membership during the past decade) who have strong academic interests in the relationship between people and plants.

9. With the bleak outlook of climate change and global warming on the fate of the earth, what aspect of your professional life gives you hope for the future?

If the global temperature increases by a few degree centigrade and sea level rises by a meter, life on earth will be changed radically. Yet, we still will rely on plants to provide food, medicine, wood, and many other essential items. It is up to the SEB to help determine how to accommodate this inevitable change.
Honors and Awards

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phylogeny. "Peter Endress’s publication record is outstanding. His book Diversity and Evolutionary Biology of Tropical Flowers is a best-seller."

Dr. Endress will be the twelfth recipient of the Fairchild Medal, which is awarded each year to a scientist who has demonstrated distinguished service to humanity by continuing Fairchild’s legacy by exploring remote areas of the world, using innovative travel itineraries, conveyances, or techniques to discover new plant species or cultivars; bringing into cultivation new and important plants that hold significant promise as agricultural or horticultural varieties; and playing crucial roles in the conservation of endangered plant species. Nominations are made by an international panel of botanists and plant explorers. Fairchild medalists receive a bronze medal, a cash award, and a citation commending their dedicated and adventurous exploration.

Dr. David Fairchild, one of the greatest and most influential horticulturists and plant collectors in the United States, devoted 25 years of his life to plant exploration, searching for useful plants suitable for introduction into the United States. As an early “Indiana Jones”-type explorer, he conducted field trips throughout Asia, the South Pacific, Dutch East (Indonesia), and West Indies (Caribbean Islands), South America, Egypt, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), China, Japan, the Persian Gulf, and East and South Africa during the late 1800s and early 1900s. These explorations resulted in the introduction of many tropical plants of economic importance to the United States, including sorghum, nectarines, unique species of bamboo, dates, and varieties of mangoes. In addition, as Director of the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction of the United States Department of Agriculture during the early 20th century, Dr. Fairchild was instrumental in the introduction of approximately 75,000 selected varieties and species of useful plants, such as Durum wheat, Japanese rices, Sudan grass, Chinese soy beans, Chinese elms, persimmons, and pistachios.

Fairchild and his wife, Marion Bell Fairchild, daughter of Alexander Graham Bell, purchased property in South Florida in 1916 and created both a home and an “introduction garden” for plant species found on his expeditions. He named the property “The Kampong,” the Malay word for “village.” The unique tropical species he collected from Southeast Asia in the 1930s and 1940s are still part of the heritage collections of The Kampong, which operates today as part of the not-for-profit National Tropical Botanical Garden (www.ntbg.org). The NTBG includes five gardens and three preserves in Hawai’i and Florida and is dedicated to conservation, research, and education relating to the world’s rare and endangered tropical plants.

Jobs

Are You Looking for a Job?

Check the SEB website where we list jobs under the heading of News, then Opportunities: http://www.econbot.org/_news_/index.php/sm=01

I came across one outside firm you might want to contact: Kincannon & Reed foodforthought@krsearch.net; http://www.krsearch.com/news-resources/food-for-thought.php

Here’s another one...

The Nature Conservancy
Job Title: Senior Social Scientist
Job Number: 400003 (Applied Scientist III)
Salary Grade: 8 FLSA

The Nature Conservancy seeks a broadly trained, experienced social scientist with expertise in qualitative and quantitative methodologies and monitoring and evaluation of conservation and/or development projects, preferably in a transnational or multinational setting. Preferred locations for this position include Brisbane, Australia; Washington, D.C.; Mexico City, Mexico; Cartagena, Colombia; or Brasilia, Belem, or Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Based on location and work eligibility of candidates, job offer may be contingent upon The Nature Conservancy’s ability to obtain a visa/work permit.

Essential Functions:
The Senior Social Scientist will support the effective integration of social science approaches, methods and tools into the development and evaluation of the Nature Conservancy’s conservation strategies. The position will accomplish this by (1) working with specific field projects and field staff in a consulting capacity; (2) developing guidance documents, handbooks, and tools to assist practitioners throughout the Conservancy; (3) leading training workshops and sessions; (4) participating in and leading working groups. The types of consulting, training, and guidance to be provided include assisting practitioners to assess changes in stakeholders’ knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and socio-economic condition, as well as evaluate equity issues and dimensions of human well-being including empowerment, social capital.

Basic Qualifications:
• Master’s degree in sociology, developmental economics, human geography, applied anthropology, political science, or other social science field and at least seven years experience or equivalent combination of education and experience.
• Professional field experience in international development, integrated conservation and development projects and/or biodiversity conservation.
• Demonstrated experience with qualitative social research, participatory rural assessment, or quantitative social research methodologies.

Application Deadline: April 2, 2010

How to Apply:
Visit www.nature.org/careers and apply to job #11835. Electronic applications only. Faxes and emails will not be considered. Please submit résumé and cover letter as one document. Please note that in order to be considered for the position, all sections of online application must be completed (e.g., work experience and education, even if information is included in résumé).
Honors and Awards

Garden Honors Swiss Scientist
Dr. Karl Endress Continues in the Tradition of David Fairchild

Kalaeo, Kaua‘i, Hawai‘i USA (Jan. 7, 2010)—Distinguished botanist and researcher Dr. Peter Karl Endress of the University of Zurich has been named the 2010 recipient of the esteemed David Fairchild Medal for Plant Exploration, the National Tropical Botanical Garden. As the recipient of the twelfth annual Fairchild Medal, Dr. Endress will be recognized for his contributions to systematic botany and the study of floral microfeatures, breeding systems, and the genus Monimiaceae, among several other subjects.

Upon learning he was selected to receive the esteemed Fairchild Award, Dr. Endress said it was a “wonderful, very unexpected surprise.” From his home in Switzerland, he wrote, “This is a great honor, all the more as I’m not an explorer in the classical sense. My focus is not on geographical areas but on plant groups. I explore specific relic plant groups in various tropical regions of the world.”

“NTBG has developed into an invaluable institution for research on tropical plants that benefits scientists, students, and plant enthusiasts. Because of this broad scope of the organization, it is an especially great honor to receive this medal,” wrote Endress.

Dr. Endress, who earned a Masters Degree and Ph.D., both with distinction, from the University of Zurich in the 1960s, has held nine positions with the University of Zurich from 1964 to the present. Since 2007 he has been Professor Emeritus. Additionally, Dr. Endress has acted as Director of the Institute of Systematic Botany and Botanical Garden of the University of Zurich.

As an internationally noted authority on floral morphology and biology, Dr. Endress has spent decades advancing a better understanding of the evolutionary origin of flowering plants. Dr. Endress has conducted extensive field work from Central, South, and North America to the Indian sub-continent, China, Oceania, and Papua New Guinea to Madagascar, Japan, Hawaii, the Caucasus Mountains, and across Africa.

Few have produced the quality and volume of popular and academic published materials that Dr. Endress can claim as his own. With over 400 publications in primarily peer-reviewed international journals and highly regarded books on botany, Dr. Endress has garnered not only the respect and admiration of fellow scientists, but also a high-level reputation with botany students at all levels.

Chipper Wichman, NTBG’s Director and CEO said, “Dr. Endress’s unparalleled knowledge stems from the kind of extensive fieldwork that makes him a worthy recipient of the Fairchild medal. The meticulous insight and microscopic observation possessed by Dr. Endress is the kind to which David Fairchild also aspired.”

Dr. P. Barry Tomlinson, Harvard Professor Emeritus and NTBG’s Distinguished Professor of Tropical Botany, called Dr. Endress “undoubtedly one of the most distinguished of all modern botanists.” Tomlinson lauded Endress for his leading work on floral morphology in relation to flowering plant...