

Society For Economic Botany Newsletter

PLANTS & PEOPLE

A biannual newsletter published by and for the members of the Society for Economic Botany

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2020 Annual Meeting

May 31 - June 4 at the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica is where we will meet jointly with the International Society for Ethnobiology. Our theme will be, "Out of Many, One People: Biocultural Diversity Across Borders." We have organized the symposia according to 7 of the 17 U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. Block those dates now and join us for collaboration, connection and community that will inspire and support your career.

Registration is open and limited to 350 participants so do not hesitate to get your registration submitted and save on early registration by March 31, 2020.

<http://www.econbot.org/home/meetings/economic-botany-2020/registration.html>

Field Trips

Unlike most of our meetings we will have field trips during the meeting. The costs vary, but are very reasonable and will be a great opportunity to meet and spend time with colleagues.

- Field Trip 1: Blue and John Crow Mountains
- Field Trip 2: Port Royal & Calisnoes
- Field Trip 3: Charles Town Maroon Community & Castleton Botanical Garden
- Field Trip 4: University of the West Indies guided tour and visits to Hope Botanical Gardens and the Bob Marley Museum <http://www.econbot.org/home/meetings/economic-botany-2020/field-trips.html>

Speakers

We can now see the speakers who will be highlighted during our meeting check them out. You can see the coordinating committee has gone to great lengths to put together an esteemed team of experts. <http://www.econbot.org/home/meetings/economic-botany-2020/keynote-speakers.html>

Logistics

All transportation, dormitory, and hotel info are listed on the website [econbot.org](http://www.econbot.org) under meetings. Drop down the meeting heading and the 2020 meeting details are there for you.

On behalf of the International Society of Ethnobiology and the Society for Economic Botany, we write to announce the postponement of this summer's Jamaica meeting to 2021.

Plants & People

**The Newsletter of
The Society
for
Economic Botany**

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The articles within the Newsletter are independently submitted and do not represent the position of The Society For Economic Botany as a whole.

Deadlines for submissions are February 1 (Spring Issue) and September 1 (Fall Issue).

Notes from the Field

Spring is approaching and June is when many of us usually dream of visiting Jamaica, so *I hope you all can change your plans and come in 2021*, now is our opportunity.

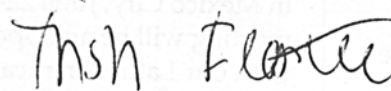
Also we are fortunate to have some students submit information about themselves, so contact them for more details about their research and any guidance you can offer.

A controversy about the term Economic Botany recently arose, so there are two definitions from experienced members who reside within Economic Botany and therefore its daughter Ethnobotany.

Looking forward to seeing you in *Jamaica in 2021* to hear Diane Ragone give her DEB address on her life and *Artocarpus altilis* (Parkinson) Fosberg breadfruit, the cultural uses, and development to feed the world.

Please send articles. As you see, this is one of the shortest newsletters I have written in many years. We need to hear from you and to share our field studies, our successes, and our failures. They are all part of our paths.

Regards,



Trish Flaster, Editor



On behalf of the International Society of Ethnobiology and the Society for Economic Botany, we write to announce the postponement of this summer's Jamaica meeting to 2021.

Pollinating the Field

Helping Hands: The Roles of Assistants in Ethnobotany

Post by Karsten Fatur, SEB student representative elect, Ph.D. student in biology at the University of Ljubljana.

As the sun shone on the Adriatic, I watched families flocking to the beach, enjoying another perfect day in paradise. My legs, however, were not carrying me to the sea's cool embrace, and my back turned on the pristine beauty and revelry behind me.

I knew today was not a perfect day.

At about 35 degrees by 10am with the sun beating down on me, I headed off to conduct my interviews for the day on the usage of medicinal plants in the coastal region of Slovenia. Though the weather was indeed beautiful for a day on the beach or one spent reading in the shade, it was not ideal for fieldwork. For hours I stood in the hot sun, unable to find shade in the scrubby Mediterranean vegetation. My hands were busy trying to do many things (taking notes, collecting and photographing samples, and recording the interviews), so I could not hold the umbrella I would usually use to shade myself from the sun. When the wind picked up, things got even worse, with my samples trying to fly away with each gust that also pulled at my various supplies and made it more difficult to hear the informants whose answers were crucial to my research. At one point, the cellphone I was recording on overheated and could no longer function.

I, however, was lucky; I had assistance. An extra set of hands from my friend who had accompanied me to help me with interviews on that day. Hands that held the phone close to informants' mouths as they spoke, while I gathered samples with others. Hands that flew in to offer extra hold on things that tried to fly off in

the wind. A body that would sometimes stand over me and block the sun's harsh rays from falling on the back of my neck.

Field assistants, the unsung heroes of ethnobotanical research. Though in my case, just a friend with no background in either botany or cultural studies, just the extra set of hands so eager to help made all the difference in a day that otherwise could have been a disaster.



The ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes at work in the Amazon (~1940s)

Whether they be friends, family members, student assistants, or local guides, those who assist us in our research carry out a fundamental role that I feel is too often overlooked. In their least-involved capacity perhaps they are carrying some of your things for you, but at most, they may be the local person who speaks a language that you do not and is your only means of communicating with the people you are trying to interview.

I must admit, before this day I had given the thought of assistants little consideration; I have always conducted research in areas where I was able to communicate with the local people, and my previous

fieldwork had been at a much slower pace. But with three individuals all standing around waiting on me in order to share their knowledge and get on with their days out of the sun, the pressure to carry out my tasks as quickly as possible was on. Without the help that day, I simply would not have been able to carry out my work. I would have lost samples to the wind, my recording would have been muffled from being down on the ground with me by the plants, and I surely would have come home realizing that my day had been a complete failure on the research front.

It does raise the question of what role a research assistant plays in our work. An author for a publication is usually one who makes an intellectual contribution to the work, but isn't this what a local translator would be doing? Taking the words of their peers and shaping them into a narrative in a language that we can understand. In this case, the assistant is the first filter on the data. Does this make their contribution significant enough to warrant being included as an author on your publication, or is a note of thanks in the article more appropriate? I don't have an answer to this question. I suppose context is key. But where do we draw the line between someone who has carried out field research with us and someone who has helped us carry out field research? Maybe these are pedantic questions, but since that day I have thought of them.

Though ultimately my friend will not be listed as an author on the paper, that will hopefully come from this research, he will definitely be thanked in it. Though he may not have translated for me or helped to identify plants, the extra set of hands was exactly what I needed on that day, and a true show of friendship that he was willing to come and help me when he could have spent his day on the nearby beach lounging in the shade while the clear blue waves lapped at his feet.

A Colleague's Request *Scholarships*

I'm working on a paper that describes areas with concentrations of unprotected, range-restricted species in the conterminous U.S. states. The analysis includes both animals and plants. I'd like to compare our results to those of previous studies. I can identify several studies of priority conservation areas that include a variety of animal groups, but surprisingly couldn't find any paper describing priority areas for plant conservation in a quick google scholar search. There must be such studies out there. Can anyone point me to them?

Thanks!

Best,

Bruce

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Submitted by Kristi Foster, Head of Engagement

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Conservation Careers Ltd: Sharing information about this resource that I've just become aware of. It's aimed at finding scholarships in the conservation field—many are in the United States.... Have a look! (pardon cross-postings)

NOTE: A self-driven Q&A opens to guide you to resources; this is a cool resource but it's hard to see how to get back to the main page. To do that, just click the small "x" in the top right of the screen.

This brand-new list of 60 conservation scholarships aims to help conservationists achieve career success and help wildlife thrive, regardless of financial barriers.

Meet the scholarships here! (<https://www.conservation-careers.com/top-conservation-scholarships/>)

At Conservation Careers, we know that money can be a big barrier, and sometimes even prevent talented conservationists from furthering their careers. But we believe all conservationists should be able to pursue the best training opportunities, have the best experiences, conduct meaningful research, and lead impactful conservation projects. We hope this list helps make that a reality.

A big thanks to all the organizations that are helping conservationists achieve successful and impactful careers! If you know a great conservation scholarship that isn't on this list, please let us know.

Intro to a Student

Aurora Prehn

aurora.prehn@gmail.com

Aurora completed her BA in Anthropology and Environmental Studies from Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, where her research examined food culture at an intersection on local social and geographic landscapes. Since finishing, she spent five years in the specialty, organic tea and botanical industry finishing as a tea taster and educator. In 2019, she completed her MSc in Ethnobotany at the University of Kent and the Royal Botanic Garden Kew. Her research took her to the country of Georgia where she spent three and a half months researching the biocultural relationship between landscape, Georgians, and the grapevine, its diversity and conservation. Currently, she is located in London, England, researching the tea and teaware objects found in the Economic Botany Collection at Kew Gardens.

Write her to find out more about her research and how she can connect.



**Aurora
Prehn**

Economic Botany, What is it?

Trish Flaster, Editor

I think this is an important discussion and I apologize if it sounds like a rant to some. I encourage discussions and to use the Newsletter as a forum for feedback on this or any article.

The study of plants as a natural resource often involves financial issues. Examples are agriculture produce, garden plants, folk crafts, holiday celebrations (wreaths, decorated trees), essential oils, plants used in drug research, cultural plants, intoxicants etc. Any plant of value falls under the category of economic botany. Isn't this what many of us are studying? Why do we think studying people's livelihoods is colonial or disrespectful of our colleagues, local peoples? Don't we all need to eat, to offer our children education? All this requires financial support.

We seem to have mixed feelings about using "Economic Botany" as the name of our illustrious Society. I think we have not done a good job of defining this and strengthening how important Economic Botany is for our colleagues around the world.

In researching this a little, I found that Economic Botany was woefully defined as the study of plants as foods. We know that is much too limited, and as Economic Botanists we study, medicine, art, dyes, agriculture, architecture, textiles, and tattoos. So plants are not just foods. To differentiate Economic Botany from Ethnobotany, Ethnobotany embraces the study of plants considered as spiritual elements as well as for sustenance. Economic Botany is inclusive of Ethnobotany, as it is more encompassing. It is all interactions between plants and people. Cultures use plants in as many ways as they need to for their specific region and belief systems.

Ethnobotany is the study of culturally significant plants, all of which have eco-



nomic importance, and are therefore part of Economic Botany. An ethnobotanist wants to know, perhaps, why a plant is associated with humans in an historic civilization and in today's cultures as well.

The best definition of Economic Botany I have found, which I believe is the only accurate one, is in this website: https://botany.org/PlantTalkingPoints/economic_botany.php

Imagine a world where the plants of the planet are harnessed to help its inhabitants find sustainable solutions for some of their most pressing needs – clothing, food, housing, jobs, clean air ... clean water.

Welcome to Planet Earth!

Simply put, economic botany is the interaction of people with plants. Economic botany is closely related to the field of ethnobotany; that word is based on two Greek roots: *ethnos* (race: people: cultural group) and *botanikos* (of herbs) and can mean the plant lore of a race or people as well as the study of that lore.

Economic botanists are scientists who study the interactions between humans and plants. That makes the field of Economic Botany as far flung and diverse as both the human and plant life on our planet. Economic botanists study human-plant interactions from a variety of different angles. These skilled researchers rely on a variety of disciplines including archeology, sociology, and ecology in addition to basic botany to help them explain these interactions and their effects on plants, society and our dynamic planet.

Knowledge Systems

Economic Botany sometimes focuses on the processes as well as the products involved in plant cultivation. Scientists ask questions about how knowledge of useful plants is acquired and transmitted between groups.

In the South American Andes, potatoes are the staple of many indigenous diets.

Economic botanists are intrigued by the questions of who first ate this vegetable

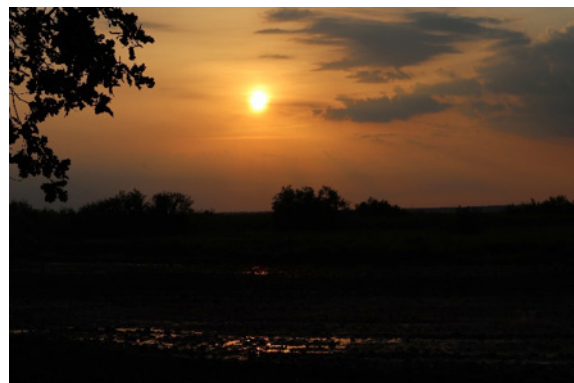
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The Love of Ethnobotany and The Spirit of Adventure

Submitted by Baiba Prūse <baiba.pruse@videsinstituts.lv>

with contributions from the ethnobotanical team from Institute for Environmental Solutions in Latvia.

The authors hope that this photo-essay will touch the young and emerging ethnobotanist, especially in regard to the adventure ethnobotanical expeditions can bring on individual level. The following photos reflect an ethnobotanical expedition in Latvia (Rūjiena & Nauksēni municipality) that took place in June 2019.



“In natural science the principles of truth ought to be confirmed by observation.”

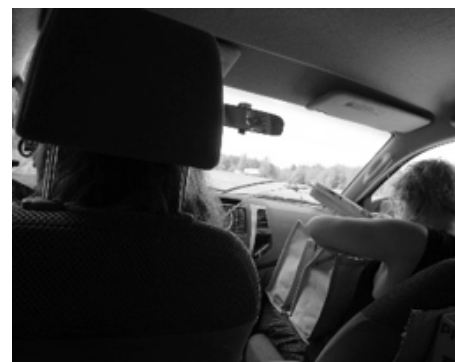
– Carl Linnaeus –



“Zieds ir tikpat liels kā jūra. Neskriet taisni jūrā, nebrist ziedā,
nekāpt dvēselē, bet iet tuvu līdzās, apiet apkārt, palikt tuvu.” [In Latvian]

Translation: The flower is as big as sea. Do not run straight in the sea,
do not step into the flower, do not climb into the soul, but go next to it, around, to stay near.

–Imants Ziedonis–



“A herbarium is better than any illustration; every botanist should make one”.

– Carl Linnaeus –

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The Love of Ethnobotany and The Spirit of Adventure

continued from page 6



“One never reaches home,’ she said. ‘But where paths that have an affinity for each other intersect, the whole world looks like home, for a time.”

– Hermann Hesse–



Credit for the photos goes to the ethnobotany team (pictured above) and the people from the municipalities: Baiba Prūse, Signe Krūzkopa, Līva Roze, Ieva Mežaka, Andra Simanova

Acknowledgment

Thanks for the positive encouragement from the ethnobotanical team of Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy. The work has been supported by ERAF co-financed project 'Innovative solutions for growing technologies and applications of spring medicinal and aromatic plants' (Nr. 1.1.1.1/18/A/043).

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Quotes by Carl Linnaeus: <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/7404500-linnaeus-philosophia-botanica>; <https://libquotes.com/carl-linnaeus/quote/lbe6w3s>

Quote by Imants Ziedonis: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1016538-zieds-ir-tikpat-liels-k-j-ra-neskriet-taisni-j-r-nebrist>

Quote by Hermann Hesse: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/12951-one-never-reaches-home-she-said-but-where-paths-that>

Whither Economic Botany?

Submitted by Dr. Brad Bennett, Past President 2004-2005,
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The term economic botany has been a source of discussion, and sometimes discord, since SEB's inception. It periodically becomes a point of contention (e.g., Ugent 2002). Consider the comments from the Society's first meeting (Gilbert 1958).

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Comment</i>
C.B. Heiser	"I like the term economic botany because it has 'botany' in it."
W.H. Hodge	"... better not to limit economic botany by definition."
L.G. Nickell	"Probably the most difficult task we have is to define economic botany if that is the term we want to use."
D.J. Rogers	"Economic botany may be considered very broadly ..."
R.E. Schultes	"...could avoid becoming unduly preoccupied over definitions. There is no word or term which will not cause trouble when one starts to define it. It includes what some people like to split off as a separate discipline under the name ethnobotany. ... But, in the final analysis, there is no way of separating the relationship between plants and primitive men from that which exists now between plants and highly advanced man."

The moniker ethnobotany, Harshberger's 1896 neologism, was a semantic substitution rather than a harbinger of a new academic focus. Nevertheless, ethnobotany's definition evolved in the 1900s, reflecting an evolution in the discipline itself. Ethnobotany became more ecological. Defining terms such as "interrelationships" and "interactions," emphasized the growing ecological aspects of the science. Ethnobotany also became inexorably linked with culture. Most ethnobotanists, not just those in anthropology, viewed culture through the use of plants and plant use from a cultural perspective. Wickens (2000), though, considered Harshberger's concept unacceptable, owing to its inclusion of the term "primitive."

Nancy Turner's (1995) ethnobotany definition is the most useful: the science of people's interactions with plants. Simple, elegant, and devoid of pejoratives, it encompasses the full spectrum of the human-plant relationship continuum. Where then does economic botany fit? C. Earle Smith (1995) considered economic botany to be nothing more than ethnobotany with a financial incentive. Others have distinguished the two fields based on a traditional vs. modern binary distinction. This approach implies that there is a fundamental difference between the way traditional people use plants and the way modern societies

use them. Etymologically, there is no reason to restrict ethnobotany to traditional societies. Practically, there is no way to assign all cultures into either the modern or traditional category.

Dick Ford (1978) separated ethnobotany and economic botany by the directness and continuity of plant use. For Ford and many others, ethnobotany is concerned with direct interactions between plants and people; economic botany with indirect interactions. This presumes that one can draw a line somewhere along the continuum. Unlike many who cite his definition, Ford acknowledges the universality of plant people interactions, "... by restricting a definition with this criterion [i.e., relative importance of plants], we may miss an important contribution of ethnobotany toward understanding a particular society, including our own."

Winston Churchill quipped, "If you put two economists in a room, you get two opinions, unless one of them is Lord Keynes, in which case you get three opinions." An analogous scenario would occur if one were to ask two SEB members, "What is the difference between ethnobotany and economic botany?" Two or more disparate opinions likely would emerge. Many now find the term "economic" distasteful and wish to expunge it to the dust bins of history. Those in favor of such action associate economic botany with colonial imperialism, a narrative crafted by historians not by scientists. The narrative is inevitably

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Whither Economic Botany?

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one sided, as it looks only at what was taken from but not what was brought into a region. Many cited examples are either exaggerated (e.g., Sir Henry Wickham's theft of rubber seeds) or patently false (e.g., William Withering's exploitation of Mother Hutton, the old woman from Shropshire). Wickham violated no extant Brazilian laws; Mother Hutton was created by an ad campaign, 130 years after Withering's death. Economic botanists should be drafting the narrative of plant exploration history, not blithely accepting bombastic theses of revisionist historians.

The disciplines of economics and economic botany, along with ecology, share the same Greek root *oikos*. They have more in common than shared etymologies. Other disciplines have no qualms about designating a subcategory with the adjective "economic." Economic anthropology studies production, exchange, and consumption, thus sharing similarities with economic botany. Other "economic" subfields are alive and well (e.g., economic entomology, economic geography, economic geology, economic forestry).

Nothing had a greater impact on the evolution of human culture than the Neolithic Revolution. Plant domestication and the shift from foraging to agriculture is Economic Botany writ large. Let us not dismiss this important part of our discipline as well as the myriad of plant-people interactions that transcend the narrower scope of ethnobotany (Table 1).

Table 1. Economic Botany Topics that Transcend the Scope of Ethnobotany

Artificial photosynthesis
Barry Bonds' home run record
British defeat at Yorktown
Growing jet fuel
Quinine and the last plane from Corregidor
Thomas Edison and the Great Phenol Plot
Tu Youyou's 2015 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine
US\$ 250K Martin prewar guitar
van Gogh's passion for yellow
What makes an Amati or Stradivarius violin so sublime?

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A Remembrance of Dr. Isabella Aiona Abbott (1919-2010)

World Renowned Expert in Central and Pacific Algae: The Intergenerational Transmission of Ethnobotanical Knowledge through Women*

by Aja Grande grande@mit.edu

I welcome the opportunity to note how quickly one's customs and religion can be swamped by the newcomer, bent on complete change, tolerating nothing of the old. [...] Aloha no i ka wā i hala (Great affection for the time that is past). The plants are still with us, and we have learned how to plant and care for them, and to duplicate the crafts if not the craftsmanship. If we seem inordinately proud of our ancestors and what they contributed, it is because the pride has brought back the spirit of the Hawaiians (Abbott, 2002: 3-6).

During the winter of 2017, I found myself rummaging through a storage room stocked with old Hawaiian history books from my paternal grandmother's high school teaching days. Joan, my grandmother, traces her ancestry to Portuguese and Spanish subjects of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1883. She used to teach Hawaiian history at Leilehua High, a public school on the west side of O'ahu island. While I parsed through the shelves, my grandmother poked her head in to discover my sincere interest in her archived life. In her usual direct way, she asked, "Tell me what you're looking for." I replied, "Something about plants." Her eyes scanned the shelves... "Here," she said, and bestowed to me a copy of Dr. Isabella Aiona Abbott's 1992 publication, *La'au Hawai'i: Traditional Hawaiian Uses of Plants*.¹ It is through this inheritance from my grandmother that I have grown to appreciate the book's author, Dr. Abbott, who dedicated her life to identify and classify seaweeds in ways that called upon both indigenous Hawaiian knowledge systems and Western botanical frameworks. Serendipitously, heritage of Abbott's work to me from my grandmother reflects a longer lineage of

Hawaiian tradition that has seen women passing ethnobotanical knowledge down to their daughters and granddaughters. This course of knowledge transfer between women exists among indigenous groups globally, in Latin America,² Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America.³ The following paper about the late Dr. Isabella Abbott, world renowned expert in central-Pacific algae, shows how a remembrance of her work may contribute to redefining notions of the environment in what seems like another era of cultural revival for Native Hawaiians.

As a mediator between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western frameworks of science, Abbott represents a way of communicating between two epistemes, or genealogies of knowing, which infuse current-day disputes about land rights in Hawai'i. To some, the Hawaiian Islands are recognized as the fiftieth state of

as sovereign territory. From a third view, a global community of scientists sees part of Hawai'i's lands, such as Mauna Kea ("white mountain"), as the ultimate place on Earth for an international observatory: the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). TMT's directors argue that its construction on Mauna Kea "represents the pinnacle of human imagination and innovation, enabling in-depth understanding of the origins of our universe while pushing further the frontiers of human knowledge."⁴ Protesters from around the state and around the world have spoken out against the building of TMT, and have literally camped out on the mountain to block construction worker access to Mauna Kea's summit.⁵ Some protesters have expressed they are protecting a way of life, while others, such as Trisha Kehaulani Watson, voice that the movement is "all about the needs of Hawaiians being disregarded for 125



America. For a handful of Native Hawaiian activists, the archipelago is regarded

years."⁶ At these intersections of social-political unrest, I hope that this paper on

*This article is an excerpt from a paper in progress.

Abbott might show how one life story can bring to light the wider arc of possible conciliations on settler colonial grounds where frameworks of Western science and Indigenous knowledges come face to face in confrontational ways.

Abbott, as a half Native Hawaiian and half Chinese ethnobotanist, defines human relationships to the *‘āina* (“that which feeds”) as part of nature as opposed to outside of it. As this remembrance demonstrates, Native Hawaiian women, as well as other Indigenous groups of women around the world, have been integral stewards of plant cultivation. In a co-authored article titled “Ua lele ka manu, or ‘The bird has flown’: Science education from Indigenous/local/place-based perspectives,” Abbott as one of the contributors points out an “educational issue in science” which emphasizes that in Hawaiian, “there are no words that convey western meanings of science, nature, or physical universe as separate from culture and identity.”⁷ Abbott has participated as an authority within the realms of both the traditional uses of Hawaiian plants and the Linnaean classification system of taxonomy. Her concept of humans and nature as inseparable is not only useful for ethnobotanists and biologists, but also important for Native Hawaiian activists and lawmakers involved in land rights and the sovereignty movement.

Based off of archival evidence and in the analytical framework of STS (Science and Technology Studies), I argue that Abbott’s social science work gives testimony to the ways in which Indigenous Native American ways of life can undergo reinvention in wake of colonialism. I discuss how her work connects to existing literature throughout the world on women’s ethnobotanical knowledge. Identifying aspects of Abbott’s work on the inter-generational transmission of Native Hawaiian women’s ethnobotanical knowledge reveals how

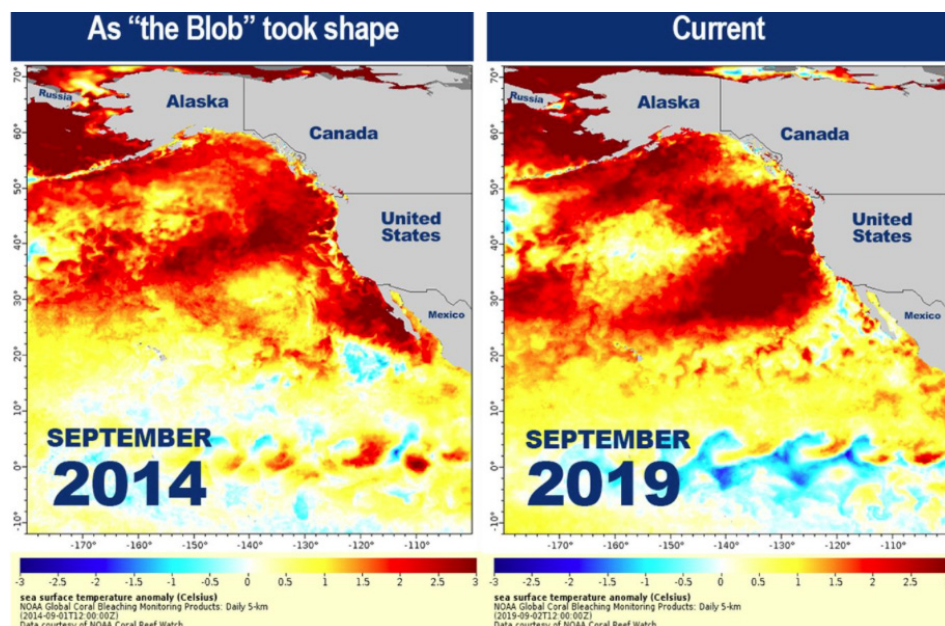


Image courtesy of NOAA Fisheries

the telling of her story speaks to issues of gender and indigeneity, topics that anthropologists and ethnobotanists have likewise grappled with. In this work, I posit that Abbott’s contributions within the period of the Hawaiian Renaissance from the 1960s through the 1980s reveals how she represents a kind of figure that maintains Hawaiian culture by combining indigeneity with Western science. Her story exemplifies the ways in which Indigenous and Western knowledge systems might proceed to more convivial and synergistic forms of understanding, living, and discovery.

Endnotes

¹Abbott, La’au Hawaii: Traditional Hawaiian Uses of Plants.

²Voeks, “Are Women Reservoirs of Traditional Plant Knowledge? Gender, Ethnobotany and Globalization in Northeast Brazil.”

³Howard, Women and Plants: Gender Relations in Biodiversity Management and Conservation.

⁴“News about TMT in Hawaii.”

⁵“Bruno Mars joins Jason Momoa and Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson to voice support for TMT opponents.”

⁶Watson, Trisha Kehaulani. “Seeking Long-Delayed Justice On Mauna Kea.”

⁷Abbott et al. “Ua Lele Ka Manu: Indigenous/local inquiry methods.” Page 2.

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Economic Botany, What is it? *continued from page 5*

and why they thought it might be appetizing and nutritious in spite of the fact that the leaves and stems of the potato plant are poisonous.

What made these cultures think that there might be something worthwhile lying beneath the surface? How did they share their knowledge and with whom?

We can also study how plants are used. In the past, this has meant lists of cultures and their preferred plant sources for food, clothing, shelter, medicine, ritual or aesthetics. Although there are roughly 250,000 species of plants divided into 460 families, we commonly use products from only 300 species in 20 of those families; just a tiny fraction of what's available.

Often a single plant will fill more than one function. The coconut palm is an excellent example of botanical versatility. It is found in cultivation throughout the tropics where it is known by many names including pokok seribu guna or "tree of a thousand uses" in Malay. All parts of the plant are used from the leaves that are woven into thatch roofs and mats to the delicious fruit and sap right down to the roots that are processed to treat everything from dysentery to bad breath.

Today, economic botanists continue cataloguing plant uses, but they also hope to discover new ones by screening for medicines such as anti-cancer agents or experimenting with ways to improve current cultivation and make it more sustainable or efficient.

It seems that there is currently some negative targeting of Economic Botany, with voices claiming that Ethnobotany is somehow superior. Economic Botany is Plants and People! Is this really so problematic?

Please write with your thoughts so we as a society can consolidate these terms and make sure students and prospective members are clear that Economic botany is also the home of Ethnobotany. Please use the Newsletter as a forum for discussion.