UPCOMING EVENTS

Thursday, Nov. 3    Fall Meeting/Student Grant Talks
Sunday, Dec. 11    Herbarium Volunteer Sunday
Saturday, Jan. 22  Herbarium Volunteer Sunday
Wednesday, Jan. 25 Herbarium Tea
Friday, Feb. 3     Workshop: Whatever Happened to Aster?
Sunday, Feb. 19    Herbarium Volunteer Sunday
Saturday, Feb. 26  Field Trip to Huckleberry Preserve
Wednesday, Feb. 29 Herbarium Tea
Saturday, Mar. 3   Workshop: Horticultural Science
“Outreach,” extending the message of the campus to the off-campus community, is a traditional part of the land-grant university mission. Many school classes visit the UC Davis Botanical Conservatory. And then, sometimes the Conservatory comes to them. Read on......

Carnivorous plants, voodoo lilies, Welwitschia, liverworts, orchids, ferns, cycads, and Dutchman pipe vines with flowers bigger than your face... at a middle school? In a greenhouse that last summer was so hot and dry it killed even the bugs that got trapped inside? Let's just say the Botanical Conservatory had more than a little to do with it....

At an August evening picnic last summer, someone mentioned to me there was a greenhouse in distress—and it was in serious distress! When Douglass Junior High in Woodland became a middle school seven years ago, the agriculture programs migrated to the high schools and the 18 x 32 greenhouse degenerated into a storage room. The present Douglass Middle School (DMS) principal, Jonathon Brunson, was discontent with its condition and instead visualized it as an attractive school and community resource. He knew Davis First Baptist Church volunteers tackled school projects and proposed the DMS greenhouse renovation be one of them; hence the comment at the picnic.

Anyway, I was hooked. The next week Jonathon gave me a key and turned me loose: the greenhouse structure and rigid polycarbonate covering were sound, just dented where kids had bounced against it to catch soccer balls. But the vents, cooling, and heating were not functioning, and the floor was crowded with 55-gallon drums of fertilizer, garden tools, and metal bench stands. To transform it to a reliable, versatile, automated greenhouse was a worthy challenge.

A friend sent an email out to some of the local biotech companies detailing our needs. Eduardo Silva and Manuel Vasquez, Woodland Monsanto facilities in conjunction with our National Science foundation grant for databasing California plant specimens, The center for Plant Diversity received an NSF Research Experience for Undergraduates summer stipend to fund three herbarium interns during the summer of 2011. Clare Loughran, Grayson Golden, and Allyson Ayalon worked all summer to annotate our specimens with the updated names that will be used in the upcoming 2012 revised Jepson Manual (the new flora of California, already available online). Clare just graduated this past June with a Plant Sciences Plant Restoration degree. Grayson is pursuing the same degree and will graduate this coming June. Allyson is a Plant Biology major, also graduating in June 2012.

While doing this job, the interns reviewed their plant families and genera (they are all alums of Dan Potter's California Floristics class), learned how to find synonyms in the taxonomic literature and online resources, and examined thousands of herbarium labels – learning information about plant collectors and geography. In some cases, the tangle of name changes required them to key out the plants using the new online keys. In the case of the suncups (Camissonia) we had to use a compound microscope and make slides of pollen to look at pollen angles to key the specimens to species.

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CONSERVATORY UPDATE

Bio 2C students present their observations on epiphyte modifications in the Conservatory headhouse. Photo: E. Sandoval

We have been busy in the Conservatory since the last issue of Lasthenia. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, I thought I would show what we have been up to with photos.

This past academic year, we had 59 students participate in our popular Conservatory internship program. More students than ever before are interested in the Conservatory internship, because the new introductory biology series utilizes three Conservatory-tended collections: the Conservatory itself, the plantings outside the Sciences laboratory Building, and the dioramas, including the new epiphyte walls, in the Sciences laboratory Building greenhouse.

All Bio 2C students tour the Conservatory and answer questions about plant adaptations. The students are broken into six groups and spend about 40 minutes collecting data on one of six plant related topics; after this, they present their observations to the rest of the students. In the Sciences laboratory Building plantings area, the students do an ecological sampling exercise. These laboratory exercises whet the students’ appetite for more exposure to the Conservatory.

We have also had a number of wonderful volunteers helping us in the Conservatory. Volunteer Spencer Abildgaard has been carefully pollinating the tiny flowers of the chocolate plant, Theobroma cacao, this summer, and for the first time ever there are multiple fruits on the plant. Pollination in the field is done by very small insects, and so this was quite unusually successful!

As usual, I hosted a Grad Cap decoration event for graduating Plant Biology undergraduates in June. Students brought their caps, and I helped them stand out in the sea of black-capped graduates with islands of verdant green punctuated by the Conservatory's flowers. A careful application of spray-on acrylic keeps the plants, at least, from wilting during the graduation.

Finally, Ted the Titan, one of our Amorphophallus titanum plants, bloomed for the fifth time during June 2011. The first bloom was in 2003, and in 2005 the plant made a stink at the San Francisco Conservatory of flowers while on loan. We had hundreds of visitors come by to view Ted's large inflorescence during our extended evening hours.

E. Sandoval

Recent Plant Biology graduate Wenting Shi with her decorated cap. Photo: E. Sandoval

The multiple fruits now growing on our chocolate plant. Photo: E. Sandoval

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2011 STUDENT GRANT RECIPIENTS

President Robbin Thorp announced the recipients of the 2011 Student Research Grants competition at the May Annual Meeting. Stella Copeland, an Ecology student of Dr. Susan Harrison, was awarded the Jack Major Memorial Award. Rachel Willner, an International Agricultural Development student of Dr. Dan Potter, was awarded the E. Eric Grissell Award.

Copeland’s project, “Testing for the effects of topography, soil type, and biotic interaction on plant environmental niche with model herbaceous species *Trientalis latifolia*,” has an elaborate experimental design for plots located in the Siskiyou Mountains of Oregon. She knows the area from having worked as a botanist for the Bureau of Land Management and having done rare plant research as an undergraduate. Sub-plots with varying characteristics will be planted and harvested, and the plants carefully weighed and measured. Copeland summarizes, “Overall, the results of this research will test the impact of biotic interactions and soils on the accuracy of climate envelope models and suggest circumstances where these factors are likely to significantly affect climate model predictions.”

Willner’s proposal, “Identification and characterization of wild plant species used in paddy production of southwestern districts of West Bengal, India” has as its objectives “to identify and characterize wild plant species used in paddy production through an ethnobotanical study of various villages and to test the validity of previously identified biopesticide preparations and modes of application in paddy.” The methodology is that of a “participatory action research project,” in which the experience and expertise of local populations is critical to every step of the process of identifying and testing plants and methods. An additional anticipated benefit of the project is enabling local people to continue to independently compile information on biodiversity after the project ends.

DBS members will be able to hear talks based on two earlier Student Research Grants projects at our upcoming Fall program, on November 3, 2011. Our speakers will be Chris Mallek and Annabelle Kleist.

K. Mawdsley

SOCIETY PROFILES

Marcel Rejmanek

Marcel Rejmanek, Professor of Evolution and Ecology at UC Davis, was engaged and enthusiastic when I arrived at his lab to prepare the traditional profile of the incoming Davis Botanical Society president. His son Honza was competing in an extreme sporting event in Europe in which parasailing and walking were the only allowable modes of travel, and the internet reported that he’d had a good day. And Marcel had collected specimens of cultivated Chinese tallow tree (*Triadica sebifera* - formerly *Sapium sebiferum*) that demonstrated that pollination occurred over two generations of bloom. The tree is now recognized as potentially invasive and has escaped along the American River Parkway in Sacramento.

Marcel’s professional specialties include plant invasions and plant community classification, as well as tropical ecology; he teaches upper division classes in Plant Ecology and Weed Biology and a graduate class in Plant Community Ecology. He regularly brings classes to the herbarium and explains its importance to students; a semi-shocked “it’s just necessary!” was the response to fishing for a sound bite on its value.

A native of the former Czechoslovakia, Marcel took all his degrees, culminating in a 1977 Ph.D. in Ecology, from Charles University in Prague. He began teaching there but came into conflict with university officials in the Communist era for speaking critically of state conservation policies and practices. Deprived of his teaching post, he moved to the Czech Academy of Sciences for several years as a biomathematician. The family, wife Elishka, now also a professor at UC Davis, and sons aged four and eight, went to Yugoslavia on vacation and hiked across an unguarded border into Austria. From there Marcel accepted a visiting appointment at Louisiana State University, realizing only after he arrived that it was in statistics, which he practiced extensively but had never taught. (As an aside, his methodological expertise results in some startling additions to his c.v. for a “plant person.”) He came to Davis as Assistant Professor of Botany in 1986 and became a full Professor in Evolution and Ecology in 1993. A detailed appreciation of Marcel’s career and contributions was published in *Preslia*, the premier Czech journal of botany, in 2006, when he was honored at his 60th birthday; it is available on the internet.

Marcel’s largest recent project is the *Encyclopedia of Biological Invasions*, co-edited with Daniel Simberloff and published by UC Press this year. Many names familiar to Davis Botanical Society members contributed to this “comprehensive and authoritative reference dealing with all the physical and biological aspects of invasive species and invasion biology and theory.” He generously donated a copy to the herbarium library.

A long road brought Marcel Rejmanek to his term as president of the Davis Botanical Society; we’re glad it did.

K. Mawdsley
The interns went through the herbarium genus by genus, checking each name to see if it needed updating. If so, they needed to annotate the specimen with the current name. If they couldn’t find the name, they needed to research the name in the taxonomic literature to try to find out if it is still current.

In addition to herbarium work, these three enthusiastic young botanists took themselves on a trip to the White Mountains of Inyo County to see the bristlecone pines. They collected herbarium specimens along the way.

We also went together on several field trips (two of which were attended by other herbarium students): one to Yolo County Grasslands Park to see the rare vernal pool grasses Cramp-ton’s Tectoria (Tectoria mucronata) and Colusa Grass (Neostapfia colusana); one to Sugar Pine Point State Park near Lake Tahoe for a day of plant collecting to make a plant list for a meadow in the park; and one to Berkeley to the Tilden Park native plant botanical garden and the Jepson Herbarium. Grayson and I also participated in a moonwort (Botrychium) survey at Emerald Bay State Park, collecting yet more herbarium specimens. Our collecting trips resulted in 150 specimens that needed keying – a good way for the interns to sharpen their keying skills.

The interns wanted to visit the Jepson Herbarium to celebrate Willis Linn Jepson’s birthday. Once there, we were given a wonderful tour by Andrew Doran, Collections Manager. Andrew showed us all the parts of the herbarium, including their new imaging equipment, the 18th century Charterhouse School Herbarium that is mounted in folios, and the Jepson Archives. We were shown Willis Linn Jepson’s personal notebooks (which are available online at the Jepson Herbarium website) as well as other diaries. Andrew told us stories about Jepson’s life. On our way home, we visited Jepson’s grave in Vacaville.

The final skill the interns learned was the process of creating a species description. All three measured specimens of Lycianthes (a genus in the tomato family) for my nearly completed taxonomic treatment for the Flora del Bajio. I showed them how their measurements would be summarized and used to complete species descriptions.

It has been a very rewarding summer. Often, our finances dictate that we hire only students with work-study awards who may or may not be interested in botany. It was wonderful to have the funds to hire young people who are pursuing careers in botany.

E. Dean
On Sunday, April 2, 2011 Dan Potter, Robbin Thorp, and Ellen Dean led the Davis Botanical Society to the well-known wildflower hot spot Table Mountain, a flat-topped butte in Butte County near Oroville. We had changed our trip date from Saturday due to predicted rainy weather. Dan Potter, Center for Plant Diversity Director, had made two scouting trips in the weeks before, and the wind gusts up on the butte had been cold, strong, and uninviting. Rainy weather would decrease the number of insects we would see, and what was the point of bringing Robbin Thorp, famed bee expert and Davis Botanical Society President, if the bees were too cold to come out? We decided to try for sunny weather on Sunday, and most of our participants were up for the date change. It turned out to be a very fortuitous decision, because on the day before, there had been hundreds of people on top of Table Mountain, bused up from Oroville for an annual wildflower day. Who knew???

After semi-caravaning to Oroville, about 24 Davis Botanical Society members and their friends met in the parking lot of the California Department of Fish and Game reserve at Table Mountain. We set off for Coal Canyon (sometimes called Basalt Canyon) to view Phantom Falls. We were partly guided by Botanical Society members Bill and Sandy Haley, who lead wildflower tours at Table Mountain on a regular basis.

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As often happen, we separated into the quick hikers, the medium hikers, and the dawdlers (which included Robbin, looking for insects, the birders, myself, and folks who were fascinated by every little thing).

It took the dawdlers a good hour to get away from the parking lot area where the volcanic hard pan is host to vernal pools. We oohsed and ahhed at lilac pretty face (Triteleia lilacina) with its sparkling flowers, took dozens of photos of volcanic onion (Allium cratericola), and admired the yellow carpet (Blennosperma nanum).

Along the way to the waterfall, we saw large patches of Kellogg's monkey flower (Mimulus kelloggii), hundreds of sky lupine (Lupinus nanus), including white albino sky lupines, and carpets of goldfields (Lasthenia californica). We also passed three beautiful waterfalls and petted the abdomen of a bee. The clear air allowed us views that spanned the entire valley to Snow Mountain on the west and the Sierra Nevada on the east.

By the time our dawdling group made it to the lunch spot, most of the other participants had finished their lunch. We sat on the edge of Coal Canyon with a splendid view of Phantom Falls, which was roaring over a 160 foot volcanic ledge with rainbow colors in its spray and a grotto at the bottom. The large amount of water that rained and snowed on California in the spring of 2011 (lasting well into June) created impressive waterfalls throughout the state, and Phantom Falls was no exception. As one member put it, it was like having lunch in Hawaii, but with a clear view of Snow Mountain.

Although, as is often the case, we did not quite cover the distance expected, and our hiking organization was somewhat disorganized, some participants felt it was one of the best nature trips they had ever experienced. Table Mountain rarely disappoints.

E. Dean
CLONING THE CONSERVATORY (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

maintenance staff, saw the email and contacted me. Before they were done, Monsanto had donated used reverse osmosis and environmental control units, both key pieces of equipment, and extensive wiring and plumbing supplies. And even more important, Eduardo and Manuel donated over one hundred hours of skilled work installing the greenhouse plumbing and electricity, building new doors, and hanging fans and lights resulting in an excellent automated environment.

The church funded the purchase of clean, light, easy-to-handle, long-lasting extruded plastic benches, and bins, tanks, pumps, and fertilizer injectors; and the school PTA designated funds for some of the exterior decorative pots and outdoor landscaping. During the October 24 community service day the church organized, a UC Davis Horticulture alumnus supervised the team filling and planting large exterior containers, others tilled outside beds or dug irrigation lines, and Pam Riley and Bob Starnes from the UC Davis Plant Biology greenhouses plumbed in the irrigation injectors.

The plants were next. Ernesto Sandoval, Botanical Conservatory Director, turned me loose in the Conservatory to gather the specimens requested by the teachers. One of the teachers wanted flowering cotton plants with cotton bolls on them. Bo Lu, Professor of Plant Biology at UC Davis, donated two beautiful specimens from his research project. At the last count, the Conservatory is the source of one hundred forty of the plants in the DMS greenhouse. And the EZ-Cloner donated through a contact with Bob Starnes is multiplying those even more. Beyond plants and equipment, Doug Walker, who oversees Conservatory pest control, continues to be an excellent counsel and source of beneficial insects for controlling the pests. And for the six weeks I was out of the country this spring, Conservatory volunteers Monica Balley-Urban and Robin Kozloff came several times a week, transplanted many of the plants, and made sure the automated watering and environmental controls were functioning.

The results have been richly satisfying! The seventh-grade science teachers, who have several weeks of plants in their life-science unit, loved having live representatives of each group they were covering. Any time the greenhouse door is open during a break, the students are in chewing on the Stevia leaves and begonia flowers, playing with the mimosa, and tending the carnivorous plants. The exterior, too, has bloomed thanks to the honors class planting bulbs and snapdragons in pots that were then transplanted around the campus and the district office, furnishing months of color. And Ernesto may be involved with helping an Eagle Scout project building a succulent-rich rock garden in a barren area facing College Street, the most public face of the DMS campus.

The Conservatory staff and collections enlighten individuals and groups in many milieus with the beauty and wonder of plants. Their generous encouragement, counsel, and plant donations to the Douglass Middle School greenhouse project are accomplishing the same result with students, parents, and teachers in Woodland.

T. Metcalf

DESERTIFICATION WE’RE HAPPY ABOUT!

In this era of global climate change, would you be surprised to hear that the foothills in Rocklin have become a desert? It’s true! Well, kind of true.

If you have never visited Sierra College, in Rocklin, do so! The College’s Science Division has extraordinary displays that astound visitors, such as mineralogical and fossil collections, life-size models of prehistoric “monsters,” and a vast collection of taxidermied animals and skeletons that range in size from the minuscule to a complete gray whale, 11.6 m (38 feet) long! There is even a planetarium that gives sky shows to visiting school groups. The displays are not restricted to the interior of the museum—an outdoor “rock walk” has well-signed, boulder-sized specimens from various North American locations which illustrate the geological history of our planet.

Plant-lovers will be happy to hear that the museum has been sprucing up its landscaping. The gravelly slopes in front of the museum illustrate xeric habitats found in California. These desert gardens had gotten a little time-worn and in need of rejuvenation. Over the years, some of the original plants in the gardens died, the identities of others were lost, and some unexpected plants simply appeared. Yes, a certain amount of chaos reigned.

To fix things up, a gang of Sierra College scientists and horticulturists came to the rescue. As a member of this group, I can proudly report that we have been busy and productive. We selected a number of new plants for the gardens that typify the various deserts, but which will thrive in the foothills climate. The early results of our efforts are promising.

The Davis Botanical Society provided critical help in two ways. First, Ernesto Sandoval at the Botanical Conservatory donated many palms, agaves, shrubs, and cacti (including columnar, barrel, and hedgehog types). These were planted this past spring, and are doing very well. Second, the Center for Plant Diversity’s herbarium collections were used to identify the already-existing plants in the landscaping, not all of which were native to the regions depicted!

This project is far from over. We are propagating more plants, such as brittle bush (Encelia farinosa) and desert mallow (Sphaeralcea ambigua) at the UC Davis greenhouses. We are accepting donations of plants that are native to the Sonoran Desert, Mojave Desert, or Basin and Range region (we especially need plain old sagebrush [Artemesia tridentata]). If you would like to help, please contact me at brice@sierracollege.edu.

B. Rice
Many of you may recall a young UC Davis alumna named Rebecca Wenk. She came with Gordon Harrington, Craig Thomsen and me on our Davis Botanical Society pretrip to Walker Ridge in the spring of 2010 and was enthusiastic about the fire followers. Rebecca was enthusiastic about most things having to do with plants. Therefore, I am very sorry to report that Rebecca passed away on July 14, 2011 from complications of thyroid cancer. She was only 31 years old. I can’t tell you how much we will miss her positive outlook on life. She was an inspiration to me.

Rebecca received her Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Arts degrees from UCD in 2002. She was a double major in Evolution and Ecology and Geology. She received her Masters degree in plant systematics from San Francisco State working with Tom Daniel at the California Academy of Sciences. While at UCD, Rebecca was an intern in both the herbarium and the conservatory. I helped her arrange a summer internship at the Harvard herbarium where she quickly became a well-liked member of the curatorial staff. She was also an active member of the UCD Botany Club, attending many of their field trips. She joined the Davis Botanical Society while still an undergraduate and was an enthusiastic participant on many of our field outings.

In her short life, Rebecca botanized all over California as well as in the Swiss Alps, Brazil, Baja California, Guatemala, Borneo, Madagascar and Australia. At the time of her passing, she was employed by both UC Berkeley and the herbarium at the California Academy of Sciences, a blend of taxonomy and field skills that suited her temperament. She helped me access the specimens at “Cal Academy” just last January.

If you wish to remember Rebecca with a memorial gift, her family included the following information in their announcement of her passing: “We are planning to establish a nature preserve to fulfill some of her dreams about nature and plants. For those who wish to contribute, please send checks to The Nature Conservancy c/o Jessie Booth, 201 Mission St. 4th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94105 or talk directly to Jessie Booth at 415-281-0407. Please specify that donations are in memory of Rebecca Ciresa Wenk (Acct# 8425040).”

E. Dean

Recent Gifts

Herbarium Endowment
Elizabeth Bernhardt & Ted Swiecki
Ray Evert
Louise Jackson & Pat McGuire
Charles & Jessica Hughes
Barbara Monroe
Stephen Rae
Maxine Schmalenberger
Kenneth & Shirley Tucker
Carol Witham
Gary Zamzow
In honor of Elizabeth Cutter:
Lewis Feldman

Herbarium Operations
Katherine Mawdsley
Stephen Rae
Lewis Feldman
California Native Plant Society

Conservatory Operations
Lee Dunn
Tim Metcalf
Jean Gifford
Bank of America Foundation

Gifts in Kind
Johanna Kwan
Judith Jernstedt
Ellen Dean
Jeremy Rich
Michael Barbour

Davis Botanical Society Student Grants Fund
Brenda Grewell & Steve Kidner
E. Eric Grissell
Louise Jackson & Pat McGuire
Stephen Rae
Thomas Rost, Michael Barbour & Terence Murphy
Maxine Schmalenberger

Thank you for your support!