

New England Botanical Club – Minutes of the 927th Meeting

4 April 1997 Prepared by Lisa A. Standley, Recording Secretary

The 700th meeting of the New England Botanical Club, Inc., being the 927th since the original organization, met on Friday, April 4, 1997 at the Harvard Biological Laboratories with 59 members and guests present.

President Don Hudson called the meeting to order at 6:56 PM with 59 members and guests present. In lieu of a reading of the minutes of the previous meeting, President Hudson asked that guests be introduced. Three new members to the club were then introduced (in absentia all): Raymond Cranfill, Nur Ritter, and Paul Marcum.

Heading Old Business was the announcement of the NEBC Graduate Student Research Award. This year the committee of Leila Shultz, Pat Swain, and Mike Donoghue recommended to the Council that two awards be made. The Council approved a \$1,000 award to both Tatyana Rand of Brown University for her proposal "Seed supply, habitat suitability, and the distribution of halophytic forbs across a salt marsh landscape," and Thomas Vining of the University of Maine-Orono for his proposal "Phenology and hybridization of *Picea mariana* and *P. rubens* (Pinaceae) in Maine." Loud congratulations were voiced for the two.

The call for New Business brought a plea to get reservations in quickly for the June "away" meeting at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Space will be tight as other school-year-end activities will be going on in the area. [Information about motels, bed & breakfasts, and camping was included in the April mailing.] In celebration of the 125th anniversary of the Arnold Arboretum, an open house is planned for May 8th at HUH and local NEBC members will be receiving invitations.

Items of gossip included the announcement of the time and location of the Claire Cummings walk of the Friends of the Farlow, that is, Sunday, April 27th, in Miles Standish State Park, as well as an upcoming workshop offered by the herbarium at UConn on *Sphagnum* ecology and field identification lead by Ton Damman.

Vice President David Conant then introduced the evening's speaker, Dr. Gustavo Romero of the Oakes Ames Orchid Herbarium of Harvard University, here to speak to us of his experiences "Botanizing in the Lowland Guyana Region" of Venezuela.

Gustavo set the scene with a map of the north and northeastern quarters of South America, where the words Guayana, Guina, and Guyana have all been used to describe the lowland regions that are part of the greater Amazon basin. Gustavo has been particularly interested during the past number of years to document the orchid floras of several remote black water tributaries of the Orinoco River.

This work of documentation of the Orchid Flora of the Venezuelan Guayana has brought light to a number of new records for terrestrial orchids, including new reports for such things as

Duckeella pauciflora, *Eltroplectris calcarata*, *Habenaria mesodactyla*, *Palmorchis puber*, as well as several species of *Epidendrum*.

In addition to the floristic work, Gustavo and his associates have been documenting the use of epiphytic non-timber forest products, which includes the use of the climbing aroid, *Heteropsis spruceana*, for baskets, tools and furniture, species of *Clusia* and *Norantea* (the latter a genus of the Marcgraviaceae) for tools and furniture, and *Coccoloba* for furniture. The Heinz Foundation, the Lindbergh Fund, and the United Nations Development Programme have all supported this work, based on the premise that non-timber forest products cannot be used rationally unless we have biological data on which to base their management.

Gustavo has participated in expeditions to this remote region with fellow botanists Paul Berry, who is particularly interested in light woods which grow in these river basins, and Francisco Gunchez, who is interested in various fibers used to make rope and baskets, and leaves for roofing houses.

The team of botanists have been working most recently in the southern portion of the Guyana region on the Rio Guasacabi. They travel by boat, camping out along the river, sometimes using local facilities and the homes of native peoples in the region.

Gustavo shared some wonderful images of the flora, including *Bonnetia tristyla*, *Humira wurdackii*, *Tacca parkeri*, as well as the fern, *Actinosthachys*, the fungus, *Cookeina*, and a gruesome looking endoparasitic fungus in insects.

Future expeditions will be headed to the uplands of the Guyana at Cerro Sipapo (part of the Alto Orinoco-Casiquiare Biosphere Reserve), in partnership with the New York and Missouri Botanical Gardens.

With a bit of a challenge to the audience, Gustavo then asked if the group was at all interested in seeing images of typical comestibles of the Guyana - where the search for protein in particular has lead down some interested paths. Not at all a squeamish lot, the crowd uttered a loud "Sure!"

There followed in quick succession pictures of turtles literally bound for market, mean-looking fish and tarantulas, as well as brilliantly creepy caterpillars, frogs, and a very large cicada. My goodness, how bland our diet! Gustavo quieted the audience with several pictures of delectable exotic fruits, then punctuated his presentation with a parting shot of blood-sucking tabanid flies, lest we think that these travels in the Venezuelan Guyana are anything but stimulating and exciting.

With that final thought, the meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM to questions and refreshments.