

New England Botanical Club – Minutes of the 935th Meeting

6 February 1998 Prepared by Dr. Lisa A. Standley, Recording Secretary

The 708th meeting of the New England Botanical Club, Inc., being the 935th since the original organization, met on Friday Feb. 6, 1998 in the main lecture hall of the Biological Laboratories, Harvard University, with 43 members and guests present.

Following the reading of the minutes and introduction of guests, Don Hudson called for new or old business, announcements and gossip. Four new members were announced (three obtained their applications from the web site!). Don made members aware that Harvard will start ticketing cars in the MCZ and Andover parking lots in mid-February. The Club will purchase a group "Special Event" pass, and will distribute parking instructions with the announcement for the March meeting. He also noted that the Bio Labs doors are locked after 7 PM if the guard is away from the desk. Members who arrive late and are locked out should wait. Following the call for new and old business and gossip, Garrett Crow announced that he and Barre Hellquist are currently reading proofs for the long-awaited "Aquatic and Wetland Plants of Northeastern North America". He encouraged members to contact the editor at the University of Wisconsin Press for information on publication. Barre, as Chair of the Nominating Committee, read the slate of officers to be presented at the March meeting. Additional nominations may be submitted to the Committee. He urged members who wish to be on the council, or professors who would like to nominate graduate students, to contact the Committee before the next election. Don Hudson reminded all Committee chairs that annual reports are due to be presented at the March meeting. Ed Hehre noted that former Recording Secretary Bruce Tiffney has written a chapter in a new book "The Complete Dinosaur", and recommended the book as well as Bruce's contribution. Judy Warnement announced that Steve Sponberg has retired from the Arnold Arboretum, and is now director of the Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha's Vineyard.

David Conant introduced the evening's speaker, Barre Hellquist, who spoke on "Aquatic Plants of Australian Billabongs, Gilgais, and Backwaters". Barre recently returned from a 6month sabbatical at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Sydney. Barre's research work in Australia focused on *Aponogeton*, a genus of (mostly) submerged tropical aquatics with broad linear leaves and small undistinguished flowers. Some species are almost attractive, with reddish or ruffled leaves. Barre succeeded in complicating the Australian flora by turning the 4 known native species into 10 taxa, some of which are distinguished only by seed characters. The genus is threatened by aquarium hobbyists who collect large numbers of plants.

Barre soon managed to leave these plants behind and concentrate on waterlilies, the real reason he went to Australia. In his travels through the wetlands of northern Australia, Barre and various companions saw an incredible number of *Nymphaea* species: *macrosperma*, which has very large leaves and seeds but tiny flowers; *pubescens*, the only night-bloomer; *violacea*, *immutabilis*, and *atrans*, which have blue or lavender outer petals and white inner petals; *ellenii*, a dwarf white flower; *rubra*; and *gigantea*, whose populations vary from lilac to pink and deep purple. *Nymphaea atrans* flowers undergo a spectacular color sequence, initially blue and white, aging to a deep pink.

Barre was able to report that *Potamogeton* also occurs in Australia, but is not well understood there. His slides demonstrate that the floating elliptic leaves of these species look just as exciting in Australia as in North American, although the water was muddier. Tropical Australia supports a wide diversity of aquatics. Barre introduced Club members to numerous species of *Nymphoides*, some with yellow flowers; *Caldesia*, a member of the Alismataceae with leaves that mimic water lilies and fruits that mimic *Trapa*; *Monochoria*, a lovely purple-flowered genus related to *Pontederia*; *Ottelia*, a showy member of the Hydrocharitaceae, as well as the more familiar genera *Utricularia*, *Eriocaulon*; *Vallisneria*, *Triglochin* (some species look like *Vallisneria*) and *Limosella*.

Barre visited a wide range of habitats, including savannahs, tropical rain forest, coastal wetlands, beaches (no aquatics there!), and the lakes and mountains of Tasmania. His travels also provided encounters with Australian wildlife, including black swans, feral pigs, water pythons, frogs, curious cattle, and, of course, estuarine crocodiles. He learned a new vocabulary: billabongs are large seasonal wetlands; gilgais are small seasonal wetlands; and hotels are local bars.

The Club adjourned at 8:45 for outstanding refreshments, Australian wine, and conversation.