

## New England Botanical Club – Minutes of the 936<sup>th</sup> Meeting

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

The 709th meeting of the New England Botanical Club, Inc., being the 936th since the original organization, met on Friday March 6, 1998 in the main lecture hall of the Biological Laboratories, Harvard University, with 53 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. Eight new members were announced. Annual Reports from the Treasurer, the Curator of Vascular Plants, the Editor of *Rhodora*, and the Library, Cryptogamic Herbarium, and Graduate Student Award Committees were presented. Rich Stomberg invited Club members to attend the meeting of the Rock Garden Society on March 21. Norton Nickerson announced that the Tufts herbarium has been transferred to UMass Amherst. The collection includes several historic John Torrey specimens, and duplicate sets of Norton's collections from the Bahamas and New Zealand. George Newman brought *Sarracenia* divisions to distribute to eager Club members. Dave Barrington reported that the infamous University of Vermont crocus bloomed on February 22, and that he is continuing to work with Rolla Tryon. Les Eastman is investigating whether Asa Gray ever visited Maine, and asked for information. The business section of the meeting closed with Barre Hellquist's presentation of the Nominating Committee's slate of officers, which was moved by Norton Nickerson and approved by the Club members present.

David Conant, after receiving the President's gavel, introduced outgoing President Don Hudson, President of the Chewonki Foundation, who spoke on "The New Natural History: A Naturalist's Perspective on Science Education". Don admitted that he had attended his first Club meeting and was elected to membership 22 years ago, heard Barre Hellquist speak on *Potamogeton*, and blamed Dave Barrington and Les Eastman for everything that's happened since. Don promised that he would try to provide insight into his working life as a naturalist and into his personal philosophy of learning and teaching, which stems from a concern that students and the general public are poorly prepared to solve problems, address issues of ecology and the landscape, or contribute to discussions of public policy and stewardship of natural resources. Some of Don's other passions include Mt Katahdin, arctic and alpine plants, and the Appalachian Trail.

From his perspective as a teacher and lifelong student of natural history, Don shared his 4 "Lessons" for teaching: (1) A sense of place is essential to fuel a life-long passion for learning; (2) Teach what you love, so that your enthusiasm may infect even the most jaded student with passion; (3) The first job of a teacher should be to provide the space and time for unique discovery; and (4) The second job of a teacher should be to provide students with as many opportunities as possible to sort through the strands of our knowledge to find connections.

Don showed how his love of science and learning was influenced by teachers and fellow-naturalists who provided space, resources, questions, and encouragement, and demonstrated that the energy and enthusiasm of discovery is key to continued involvement and learning. He cited a recent article by E. O. Wilson in the *Atlantic Monthly*, lamenting the increased fragmentation and specialization of the scientific disciplines and the inability of scientists - or the educated

public - to find coherence among scientific disciplines or between science and the humanities. Don also quoted extensively from William Morton Wheeler's Presidential address to the American Society of Naturalists, 75 years ago, in which Wheeler railed against academic "dry rot", which he blamed on narrow specialization and senile abstraction, and the inability of professors to radiate interest and enthusiasm, particularly with respect to natural history.

Don described the Chewonki semester-long course for high school students, The Maine Coast Semester, as an attempt to practice the "lessons", teach students how to see the connections, and stimulate the sense of place that provides a necessary foundation for both lifelong learning and participation in civic life. Students take two core courses, The Natural History of the Maine Coast and Literature and the Land, along with standard courses in mathematics, history, and languages. The core courses teach ecological principles, geology, ecology, and the relations between the natural world and human culture, history, and economics, and include classroom and field exercises, discussions, and both independent and collaborative research projects. Abstract ideas are directly related to tangible experiences with local ecosystems and agriculture. Don concluded with a pop quiz from the core course requirement that students learn to recognize 100 common birds and amphibians by sight and vocalization.

A very lively discussion and debate followed Don's talk. Members seconded and challenged Don's views. Is it possible to impart a sense of place to college students, and integrate cultural, ethical, and economic issues into courses on biology, given the constraints of the teaching schedule? Do non-science issues belong in a science course? Some members challenged Don's assertion that learning comes from self-teaching, not the classroom, and whether this approach dismisses the existing body of knowledge. Some questioned the premise that natural history can be taught at more than a superficial level if students do not first understand genetics, molecular biology, or the other basics of biology. Others pointed out that most high school teachers have no understanding of natural history, and teach students advanced threads of science like genetics or biochemistry that they will have no use for in daily life, rather than teach the fundamentals of natural history and ecology that are of more value to most citizens.

The discussion moved to the refreshments room at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted as the final report of the recording secretary, Lisa A. Standley.