

Horticultural News and Research Important to American Gardeners



Research suggests that most of North America's plant extinctions occurred in the western United States, where vegetation in places like this prairie in Colorado, were not well documented.

PLANT EXTINCTION MORE COMMON

A new study reveals that 65 plant species have apparently gone extinct in the United States and Canada since European settlement of the continent. The study, titled "Vascular Plant Extinction in the Continental United States and Canada", was published last August in *Conservation Biology*. It was coauthored by Bonnie Heidel, lead botanist of the University of Wyoming's Wyoming Natural Diversity Database and Wesley Knapp, a botanist with the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, but included contributions from botanists across North America.

The research group found the majority of plant extinctions occurred in the western United States, where the vegetation was minimally explored and recorded before widespread European settlement. The researchers also note it is likely the documented extinctions vastly underestimate the actual number of plant species that have been lost, because many extinctions occurred before scien-

tists explored an area. And, of course, now the threats to plant communities are exacerbated by the effects of climate change. "By studying the trends and patterns of plants that have already gone extinct, hopefully we can learn how to prevent plant extinction going forward," said Knapp. To read the study, visit <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cobi.13621>.

RARE FERN DISCOVERED IN IRELAND

A neotropical fern previously known only from mountainous cloud forests of Jamaica, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, has been discovered in Killarney, Ireland. It seems the tiny fern, *Stenogrammitis myosuroides*, has been quietly growing in the Killarney National Park in southwestern Ireland, one of Europe's last remaining fragments of temperate rainforest. Rory Hodd, an Ireland-based botanist, discovered the fern while plant hunting. "It's rare to discover a new native plant species in Britain and Ireland—one that

we think arrived 'under its own steam', not imported by humans—but it's frankly amazing to discover a genus that's completely new to Europe," says Hodd.

Hodd shared his findings with Fred Rumsey of the Natural History Museum in London. Working with American colleagues, Rumsey identified the tiny fern as part of the rare Grammitid group, a type that prefers to grow on trees in the tropics. The scientists believe it is most likely that the fern is a relic from thousands of years ago when the British Isles had a much different climate.

The plant has not yet been assigned a common name, but Rumsey has floated the idea of calling it Kerry mousetail fern. To read the full article about the discovery, published in *British and Irish Botany*, visit: <https://britishandirishbotany.org/index.php/bib/article/view/48>.

HELP CONSERVE NATIVE BEES

A new citizen science effort is enlisting the public's help to track and record native bees. The U.S. National Native Bee Monitoring Research Coordination Network was formed by S. Hollis Woodard, an entomologist at the University of California, Riverside, and scientists across the country, after Woodard published a paper outlining the need for a coordinat-



Entomologist Hollis Woodard, founder of the new bee monitoring initiative

ed nationwide effort in the journal *Biological Conservation*. The goal is to collect data and analyze if conservation efforts are working. Zach Portman, a taxonomist at the University of Minnesota Bee Lab who is active in the bee monitoring program, feels a new methodology is needed for keeping track of native bees because existing programs often get bottlenecked with large numbers of specimens that are difficult for conservationists to identify. To avoid those issues, the bee monitoring network will partner citizen scientists with experts who will identify photos and data the contributors collect. The bee count will run through 2023. For more information on participating in the program, visit its website (www.usnativebees.com) or send an email to nationalnativebees@gmail.com.

TRACKING AND PRESERVING LEGACY FIG TREES

To ensure they would have access to traditional foods in their new home, immigrants coming to the United States from all parts of the world have brought with them slips, snips, and seeds of plants from their family gardens. Mary Menniti, as part of her Italian Garden Project is documenting the fig trees of aging Italian immigrants, collecting scion wood, and planning a fig tree garden to serve as a living museum to the regional diversity represented. Menniti's interest goes back to her grandfather, who immigrated from Italy and treasured his vegetable garden and fig trees.

For the past 10 years, Menniti has travelled the country to document these gardens. She shares the Italian-American gardens in her suburban Pittsburgh neighborhood through a walking tour and classes with home chefs. She receives stories, photographs, and seeds from Italian-American gardeners. Fig trees in particular seem to evoke the most emotion and Menniti feels the reverence stems from figs being a historical means of survival as their fruit can be dried and kept for lean times. In addition, she has documented several Italian-American gardens for the Smithsonian's Archives of American Gardens collection.

Menniti is building a physical collection of Italian-American heirloom seeds and cuttings, including figs, which she sends to gardeners around the country as part of a growing germplasm



Mary Menniti is trying to document and preserve plants brought to America by Italian immigrants.

exchange. Menniti plans to build a public garden of heirloom fig trees that will be accompanied by an archive of oral histories from each family who contributes. As the effort expands, she hopes to include contributions from other communities that connect to the fig tree, including Greek Americans and Turkish Americans. To learn more, visit the Italian Garden Project website (www.theitaliangardenproject.com).

LAFLEUR BECOMES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SHERMAN LIBRARY & GARDENS

The Sherman Library & Gardens has promoted Scott LaFleur to Executive Director, the first to hold that title at the



54-year old Corona del Mar, California cultural center. LaFleur, who joined the organization in 2013 as Gardens Director, brings more than 25 years of business and horti-

culture experience to the nonprofit. His career includes ownership of a landscape design company, a private estate manager, botanic garden director at the New England Wild Flower Society's Garden in the Woods and director of horticulture at Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. At Sherman Library & Gardens, LaFleur has

led the effort to create a five-year strategic plan, a revised mission statement, and the organization's first vision statement. He will oversee the creation of a site master plan and associated capital campaign to renovate the campus.

SMITHSONIAN GARDENS NAMES NEW DIRECTOR

Joy Columbus is joining Smithsonian Gardens in Washington, D.C. as its fourth director. After a 20-year career in public



gardens, Columbus says she is looking forward to reaching the more than 25 million people who visit the gardens in the nation's capital each year. Columbus

received her bachelor's degree in botany and horticulture from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and a master's degree in biology from John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. Most recently she served as vice president of horticulture with the Houston Botanic Garden in Texas, which opened in late 2020. Previously she worked at the Cleveland Botanical Garden in Ohio and was the director of horticulture at Cantigny Park in Wheaton, Illinois, where she initiated and coordinated the development of Project New Leaf, a multi-phase \$35 million campus revitalization plan.

SPRING FLOWER AND GARDEN SHOWS PIVOT IN PANDEMIC

Winter and early spring are the traditional time for flower and garden shows, but the continuing effects of the pandemic have caused show organizers around the country to take different approaches to their 2021 events. In some cases, shows have simply cancelled, others are holding off on making a decision, and some are pivoting to outdoor events later in the season or even fall of 2021.

The Philadelphia Flower Show has been rescheduled and relocated. It will be held June 5–13 at the historic Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park in South Philadelphia. In a press release, the show's organizers wrote,




The Philadelphia Flower Show has been reimaged as an outdoor event in June.

“The Flower Show’s move to an outdoor venue, the first time in its history, will allow for new creative expression and horticultural displays as well as social distancing and the health benefits of being outside.”

Shows that have been canceled include the Northwest Flower & Garden Festival in Seattle, Washington; the Connecticut Flower & Garden Show in Hartford; and the Maryland Home & Garden Show in Timonium.

Among shows that have not yet announced their plans is the San Fran-Nor Cal Flower & Garden Show in Sacramento, California, tentatively scheduled for April 8–11.

Given that it appears this process will remain in flux, the best advice is to check the websites of shows to get the latest information on the status. 

Written by Associate Editor Heather Prince.

