

A CONVERSATION WITH ADAM BLACK...FROM NEW CALEDONIA

Plant explorer Adam Black will be LSHR's luncheon speaker at our March 14 annual meeting. When contacted by *The Compost Pile*, Black was on his way to a horticultural safari in New Caledonia! He agreed to an email interview, which follows. All accompanying photos and captions are by Adam Black.

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN PLANT COLLECTING?

By nature I have always collected things...rocks, fossils, artifacts, reptiles, and with plants always being primary among my interests in the natural world, I was always looking for things that were different from what you could find in nurseries. If I couldn't find it in cultivation, I figured the best way to get it, and most fun, would be collecting it myself.

I was always inspired by the adventurous accounts of the early European explorers and Victorian era collectors who lost half their men to disease and savage tribes on their expedition, but



View of the New Caledonian coast from Mount Koghi.

still managed to bring back the prized orchid or other enigmatic plant that wealthy collectors had to have. Though easier to travel to remote locations, there can still be a sense of adventure today, and sometimes that adventure can even be an hour's drive from

home for a particular under-utilized plant with horticultural potential that has been under everyone's noses for some time.

WHERE'D YOU GET YOUR TRAINING?

Though my standard answer is

that I was entirely self-taught, fueled by my drive to learn everything about the world around me, it took me a while to realize that so many acquaintances I have met over the years assisted in my "training," be it landowners who allowed access to their ranch, to

MARCH 14 PLANT RELEASE SCHEDULE

Ira Nelson Horticulture Center
2206 Johnston, Lafayette

8-10 a.m. Bring 2019 plant release evaluations (printed from pages 10 and 11) to the registration desk.

Registration and distribution of 2020 plant releases.

8:30-10:00 a.m. Silent auction (Please bring items).

9 a.m. Plant auction (please bring rare or unusual plants).

Petroleum Club of Lafayette
111 Heymann Blvd., Lafayette

11 a.m. Bar open.

Noon Luncheon Buffet (be sure to preregister and pre-pay by March 6; see treasurer's report, page 12).

Guest speaker Adam Black, "Exciting New Plants Adaptable to the Gulf Coast." General meeting follows.

botanists and botanical garden staff and to many hobby collectors who understood my serious interest.

The botanical/horticultural network is a powerful tool for the exchange of knowledge. I don't see how anyone who wants to be a botanist or horticulturalist somewhat from scratch could become an expert simply through formal education.

Growing up in south Florida, I escaped the city whenever I could, and was one of the few kids more interested in the identities of the plants I was seeing around me, and with the drive to locate those in field guides I hadn't found yet.

WHAT ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS OR ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM PREVIOUS JOBS?

I worked for a botanical garden as a horticulturalist for several years, and then, in an unusual series of events, ended up managing the University of Florida forest pathology and forest entomology labs. I got to travel the world assisting students in far-flung places while enjoying the local flora. Aside from that perk, I soon realized my traditional approaches of plant disease/pest biology were antiquated, and with so

many cases we worked with, it was so clear that most issues we have with our plants are due to their intolerance for the conditions we want them to grow in.

Give a plant what it really wants, and you eliminate the vast majority of the cultural issues that plague many gardeners. It was clear that insecticides, fungicides, etc., were simply band-aids on an unhappy plant that was simply going to develop another stress-induced disease or infestation due to the underlying issues not being addressed.

Being involved with phylogenetic work also helped solidify my understanding of plant classification and made it easier to understand the technical papers I was always looking up out of personal interest.

DOES YOUR PLANT EXPLORATION TAKE PLACE CHIEFLY IN WILD AREAS, OR DO YOU ALSO VISIT BOTANICAL GARDENS AND PRIVATE PLANT COLLECTORS AS SOURCES OF PLANTS?

Though I much prefer exploring beautiful, remote areas and the fascinating plants they contain, collaborating with locals... be it staff at a botanical garden or simply amateur plant collectors can be an invaluable for success.



Styphelia sp. (Ericaceae), possibly *S. dammarifolia*, in the understory near the summit of Mount Mou, New Caledonia

It is interesting to see what is being grown locally, and what might be a common landscape plant in one part of the world may be the next great item to introduce to an appropriate region of the U. S.

Studying the civilized and disturbed areas is also fascinating to me, as I find it interesting to see what their exotic invasive plants are. Where I currently am in New Caledonia, there are several plants native to Texas that I would consider noxious weeds here — *Tecoma stans* and *Malva-viscus drummondii*. They are more successful colonizing disturbed areas here than they are in Texas!

WHAT'S THE MOST EXCITING PLANT OR PLANTS YOU'VE DISCOVERED?

Where to begin? There is always excitement to find something on my exceptionally long, ever-growing bucket list. On my first trip to Taiwan, a friend asked me to look for *Arisaema thunbergii*

ssp. *autumnale* — which is the only jack-in-the-pulpit that flowers in autumn. I researched it and found it was very rare in habitat, couldn't find any mention of even general locations it had been found, and quickly dismissed the

"...A BEAM OF WARM SUNLIGHT PIERCED THROUGH THE GLOOMY FOG AND THERE IN FRONT OF ME, BACKLIT BY THE LOW AFTERNOON LIGHT, WAS AN ASSEMBLAGE OF STRIPED JACK-IN-THE-PULPIT INFLORESCENCES GLOWING LIKE DARK-STRIPED, GOLDEN LIGHT BULBS ON THE FOREST FLOOR."

notion that I would ever find it. When later driving through the fog-enshrouded middle elevations of the northeast Taiwan mountains

one October, nature called, so I pulled over and ducked into the forest.

As I was doing my business, a beam of warm sunlight pierced through the gloomy fog and there in front of me, backlit by the low afternoon light, was an assemblage of striped jack-in-the-pulpit inflorescences glowing like dark-striped, golden light bulbs on the forest floor.

On a return trip in spring, I hoped to catch the plant in fruit for seed collections, but found the entire mountainside where the plants used to be had sloughed off in a landslide! Another time I



Parsonsia flexuosa, another New Caledonian milkweed relative growing in the maquis habitat. At right, a juvenile *Costularia xyridioides* (Cyperaceae).



The New Caledonian maquis habitat.



rediscovered the mistletoe cactus, *Rhipsalis baccifera*, in the Florida Everglades, which hadn't been seen since the 1960s and was thought to be extirpated...all because I happened to go ashore at a random spot to urinate!

It seems that many plant collectors have their "found this rare plant during a bathroom break in the bushes" story.

HAVE YOU DISCOVERED NEW SPECIES? IF SO, WHICH ONES?

In Taiwan I have found things that don't match anything known scientifically, usually the smaller, less conspicuous or localized plants. But in diverse places of the world it is not uncommon for many plants not to have been formally named scientifically.

Nowadays botanists don't have funding to spend time tackling these issues, so generally things only get named if a student's work happens to involve taxonomic work on a particular group of plants, or if something is of economic value.

Where I used to work at Peck-erwood Garden, founder John Fairey and collecting partner Carl Schoenfeld collected over a dozen species of Mexican mock oranges (*Philadelphus* spp.), with only a few proving to match the



Another stunning *Styphelia* sp. with its colorful new flush of leaves, on Mount Koghi, New Caledonia.

known, described species. The last time someone worked on the genus in that part of Mexico was half a century ago, and therefore we need some modern attention from some interested botany student's thesis.

That brings up the importance of passionate plant collectors

who go out and find new things, bringing them to the attention of others, and...most importantly...bringing them into cultivation with proper collection records, then getting them backed up in botanic gardens and other suitable collections. Though they may remain as an unidentified

species for some time, they will be more accessible to that one botanist in the future who finally takes interest in them, and by that time, they might not exist in the wild any more due to alteration of the land. Lots of plants exist today only because someone brought them into cultivation.

WITH ALL THE PLANET-WIDE CONCERN ABOUT INVASIVE SPECIES AND UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF IMPORTED PLANTS, HOW MUCH PAPER WORK AND CHAGRIN DOES IT TAKE TO GET A PROMISING NEW PLANT FROM ABROAD INTO THE USA?

First you need to be familiar-

ized with the USDA's permitting system and its restrictions for what you can and can't bring in. Small batches of seeds are relatively easy with the USDA's small seed lot permit, assuming you follow the rules. Plants are more difficult; they need to appear totally disease/pest free, roots washed free of soil, etc. For plant parts other than seeds, the USDA requires an inspection and phytosanitary certificate from the country of origin to accompany plants entering the U. S. In some countries, this is a very difficult process, and the staff at the local agriculture department often has no idea how to handle a non-agricultural shipment of a variety of random plants they never knew existed. Therefore the default reaction is often to refuse release of the plants out of the country, or excessive bureaucracy intervenes.

In this case it is often beneficial to have affiliation with a botanical garden and explain your experiences importing plants from other countries, educate them on the U. S. requirements, show them that you have followed all the rules, and hopefully they will understand that you are doing things ethically. It all depends on the country though, as some are

very restrictive about their natural resources leaving the country for a variety of reasons, even for scientific research.

DO YOU SPECIALIZE IN PARTICULAR TYPES OF PLANTS (E.G., BROMELIADS, CYCADS, VINES) WHEN SEEKING NEW PLANTS?

It is easier to list the types of plants I don't generally focus on! Be it woody plants, perennials, grasses, ferns...I tend to gravitate toward the unusual...perhaps a distinctive-appearing species in an otherwise familiar family, or just things that aren't on anyone's radar that add new interest.

I am always on the hunt for winter-interest plants, better selections of commonly cultivated plants, and better alternatives to plants that shouldn't be grown in a particular area but still are!

I also focus on plants that need to be brought into cultivation for conservation purposes. For example, I have been working with collaborators on collecting the rare species of oaks in central and west Texas and getting them distributed to various botanical gardens in suitable places throughout the U. S. Early on, I went through phases — once I was crazy about cycads, then aroids, then warm



Pseudolycopodium densum shedding its spores on the windswept slope of Mount Koghi.



Tarenna hexamera (Rubiaceae) endemic to the southern New Caledonian maquis.



This *Nepenthes vieillardii* was begging for its photo to be taken, growing in an otherwise barren rocky alcove in the New Caledonian maquis.

climate conifers, then rare maple species...and I still like them all, but I feel that as time has gone on I look at the big picture. I like my collections to benefit science, conservation, and ornamental horticulture. There is sometimes quite a bit of division between these areas, sadly.

IN YOUR CURRENT VISIT TO NEW CALEDONIA, WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE?

Even though we are talking about plant collecting, I am not here to collect plants for the most part. Though I no longer manage the forest pathology lab at the University of Florida, I still continue to work with them on on-going projects.



Adiantum fourneri, I think, on a vertical seepage in the maquis.

Finding candidates who can tolerate long strenuous hikes, carrying heavy equipment, and then living primitively on a cold, windy, perpetually raining mountaintop for days on end is hard to do, but the opportunity to be working among the unparalleled, otherworldly flora that occurs there is, for me, the experience of a lifetime.

This trip is the final data collection trip centered around a Ph.D. student's work that assesses a severe disease issue in *Araucaria humboldtensis*, a very rare relative of the more familiar Norfolk Pine. This pine only occurs in several small populations high in the mountains. Aside from collecting samples for disease analysis, we are also collecting seedlings to be used both for inoculations to verify pathogenicity, as well as to back up this species in cultivated collections.

Long having an intense interest in the many primitive plant lineages found here, I would love to collect many other things for both conservation and horticultural potential, but unfortunately New Caledonia is highly restrictive of its flora and fauna. The natural areas are highly threatened and many species have become extinct in recent years due to strip



Costularia fragilis, the wonderfully strange New Caledonian sedge (Cyperaceae) with branching stems and attractive foliar arrangement.

mining for nickel, as well as other human disturbances, and in my opinion not enough sound conservation is being done.

There is a resistance among the government with allowing things out of New Caledonia even for ex-situ conservation, mostly due to bureaucratic issues, meanwhile they continue to lose species. Luckily we were able to negotiate the ex-situ conservation of this



Plerandra sp., maybe *P. calcicola* (Araliaceae) in the low elevation humid forest of New Caledonia.



Pancheria sp., one of New Caledonia's many members of the family Cunoniaceae.

sadly, a lot of good collections, and the amazing staff that curated them, have been lost due to mismanagement from higher up.

Though I'm not collecting plants, I am collecting so much first-hand knowledge of the flora here, bringing back so many amazing photos to share, and hopefully helping to shine the light brighter on this botanically amazing piece of the world and the challenges being faced.

species at the very least, though for now they remain restricted to botanic gardens and can not be shared further to the horticultural community, which I disagree with.

Passionate private collectors are often the best safeguard for conservation germplasm. Since botanic garden directorship changes over time, so does attitude toward the value of plant collections, and

Going back to visiting with locals...by total chance we got to talking with a Kanak tribal elder woman who is among the last of the generation that has knowledge of the local uses for the native plants. After taking us on a short walk through her property showing us what various plants are used for, it turned out she happened to know of one of

the few remaining populations of *Callitris sulcata*, a tropical conifer heavily exploited in the past for its rot-resistant lumber.

Though it deviated from our mission, we had to make a special trip to see these old trees, spared due to their contorted form not being suitable for house posts. We would have never seen them without this local knowledge, and experiences like that really put things into perspective.

WITHOUT GIVING AWAY YOUR BEST MATERIAL FROM YOUR LSHR PRESENTATION, WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF NEW PLANTS ADAPTABLE TO THE GULF COAST...AND WHY ARE THEY EXCITING?

I tend to present regularly about new or underutilized plants for the Gulf Coast, and I am always changing my presentations to adapt to local interest. In addition to totally new species from far corners of the earth that few have ever seen before, I also like to highlight native plants that have been under everyone's noses for ever. I have always been a proponent of gardens that look good even in the dead of winter, so I will be sure to include some winter interest plants everyone should be growing.

I also like to include exciting,

new or rarely used cultivars of otherwise overused plants. One example of the latter with Louisiana connections would be a golden live oak, *Quercus virginiana* 'Grandview Gold.' It originated at the former Grandview Nursery and later sparingly sold by Durio Nursery in the past, but has its propagation challenges of need-

ing to be grafted or rooted.

Today it seems to be in only a few collections, but with other more readily available grafted plants on the market surely some nursery could resurrect this cultivar and make it more available. It is absolutely stunning when it flushes out its shocking gold new growth in spring.

"...LIVING PRIMITIVELY ON A COLD, WINDY, PERPETUALLY RAINING MOUNTAINTOP FOR DAYS ON END IS HARD TO DO, BUT THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE WORKING AMONG THE UNPARALLELED, OTHERWORLDLY FLORA THAT OCCURS THERE IS, FOR ME, THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME."



Adam Black

MORE EXOTIC NEW CALEDONIA PLANTS FROM ADAM BLACK



Alphitonia neocaledonica (Rhamnaceae) is a common tree in New Caledonia and especially conspicuous when flushing its rusty indumentum-covered new growth.



A branch felled by a cyclone that recently skirted New Caledonia afforded a close-up view of this *Agathis moorei* cone.



Anoectochilus imitans is one of the “jewel orchids” that occurs in New Caledonia, here growing on the base of the giant fern *Ptisana attenuata*.



Looking like fruit, this is actually a flower of *Montrouziera verticillata* (Clusiaceae). Common in the New Caledonian maquis.

LUNCHEON MENU March 14, 2020

PETROLEUM CLUB OF LAFAYETTE
 111 Heymann Blvd.
 (corner of St Mary & Pinhook Road, use Heymann Blvd.
 parking)
 WALNUT ROOM

Salad

Tossed greens with choice of dressing

Entrée

Sliced brisket with gravy
 Fried fillet of catfish

Vegetables

Corn macque choux
 Vegetable medley

Starches

Cornbread dressing
 Lyonnaise potatoes

Desserts

Bread pudding with hard sauce
 Chocolate cake

Tea, coffee, and dinner rolls with butter; cash bar.

Spring 2020 luncheon reservations are due March 6.

The luncheon costs \$25 per person and includes tax and tip. Please send reservations with name of member and guest. Sorry, the luncheon cannot be reserved the day of meeting. Mail check to: LSHR, P.O. Box 51366, Lafayette, LA 70505

Any questions, contact JoAnn Pugh,

joannpugh@hotmail.com cell 337-247-5526

Herbertia lahue, Prairie Nymph

story and photos by Dr. Ellis Fletcher

Can you think of a landscape surprise that regularly happens each year? Wouldn't it be even more remarkable if this surprise occurred every year? If you grow Prairie Nymph, you know exactly what is meant.

Herbertia lahue, the Prairie Nymph, was an LSHR release in 1991.

This native, a member of the iris family, has exotic-looking flowers that seem to appear overnight during early to mid-spring. Then, after flowering and developing seed, plants disappear without a trace until the next spring. Dormancy lasts longer than the period of active growth and flowering.

Individual flowers open in the morning and close in the afternoon of the same day; however, with established plants the period of bloom occurs with flushes for nearly a month. Without interference, or with collection and distribution of seed, plants spread quickly forming clumps, colonies or nearly carpeting the area in which they occur. Upon maturity



AN LSHR FAVORITE RELEASE

the erect, ovoid, flat-topped capsules reveal numerous small seed upon opening from the apex.

Narrow-lanceolate, 3-6 inch leaves may be easily confused with grass but differ as leaves of the apparently care-free Prairie Nymph are conspicuously pleated along their length. Basal leaves are longer than those on mainly

single or sparsely branched flowering stems. Most often only a terminal flower, about 2 inches in diameter, is present on a flowering stem.

Herbertia lahue has outermost floral segments that differ in size, shape and color when compared to the innermost segments. The showy portion, or flower, is re-

ferred to as having tepals rather than petals or sepals. The apparent petals are much larger, flattened, widely lanceolate and are primarily pale to dark violet in color with nearly white bases that are irregularly spotted with dark violet or purple. The apparent sepals are materially smaller, lanceolate, upward pointing and dark violet or purple in color.

Plants perform well over a wide range of soil types but tolerate extremes when the soil reaction approaches neutral or is slightly alkaline. Plants are not demanding of high amounts of water or

excellent drainage, as they are not actively growing during much of the summer, fall and winter. Plants perform well in both full sun and partial shade with shorter, more profuse flowering with more sunny locations.

Argentina Prairie Nymph, Celestial, Herbert's Dwarf Iris, Herbert's Iris, Herbertia, Dwarf Meadow Iris, Dwarf Prairie Iris, Meadow Iris, Miniature Iris, Native Prairie Nymph, Plains Iris,

Pleatleaf Ground Iris, Pleatleaf Iris and Propeller Plant are other common names for *Herbertia lahue*. In addition to occurring

naturally in areas from Texas eastward to Florida, identical populations of the Prairie Nymph are found in southern regions of South America. Thus, some debate as to whether this bulb-forming, delightful, spring-time, trouble-free plant is truly a native or not.



MEMBERS WHO RECEIVED 2019 PLANT RELEASES MUST PRINT AND FILL OUT THIS FORM AND PRESENT IT MARCH 14 TO RECEIVE YOUR 2020 PLANT RELEASES

Your Name

LSHR 2019 PLANT RELEASE
 EVALUATION FORM

Plant	Location	Insects/Diseases	Living	Rating	Comments *
	(circle one)		(yes/no)	(circle one)	
	1 = am sun			1 = Poor	
	2 = pm sun			2 = Good	
	3 = full sun			3 = Excellent	
	4 = part shade				
	5 = full shade				
1 <i>Cestrum diurnum</i> Day Blooming Cestrum	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
2 <i>Iris brevicaulis</i> Zig Zag Iris	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
3 <i>Leucothoe axillaris</i> 'ReJoyce' ReJoyce Leucothoe	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
4 <i>Michelia</i> Hagiwara Everblooming	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
5 <i>Ocimum selloi</i> Bell Pepper Basil	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	

* Please use the comments column to note additional information, e.g. fragrant, showy, colorful etc.

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	1 = am sun			1 = Poor	
	2 = pm sun			2 = Good	
	3 = full sun			3 = Excellent	
	4 = part shade				
	5 = full shade				
6 <i>Pieris ryukyuensis</i> 'Temple Bells' Temple Bells Pieris	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
7 <i>Rhododendron</i> x 'Radiant Red' Radiant Red Native Azalea	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
8 <i>Rhododendron</i> x 'Spring Fanfare' Spring Fanfare Azalea	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
9 <i>Zenobia pulverulenta</i> Woodlanders Blue Zenobia	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
10 <i>Zephyranthes rosea</i> Pink Rain Lily	1 2 3 4 5			1 2 3	
* Please use the comments column to note additional information, e.g. fragrant, showy, colorful etc.					

THE COMPOST PILE

NEWSLETTER OF THE LOUISIANA SOCIETY FOR HORTICULTURAL RESEARCH

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Editor: Dr. T. Michael Maher
tmmaher@gmail.com

LSHR plant people, send me your news!
I welcome articles and photos about your favorite plants,
growing techniques and plant lovers.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The big day for all LSHR members is just around the corner. We will have a great auction, special plant releases, a luncheon and, of course, getting to visit with so many gardeners.

I think we all will be thrilled with the presentation by our guest speaker, Adam Black. He has toured many unusual places in the world and has been able to enjoy and study countless rare plants. Glenda and I enjoyed his many posts on Facebook of his recent visit to New Caledonia plus many other countries. This would be a great time to invite a friend as your guest for the luncheon in order to enjoy a great presentation.

As most of you have probably heard Mrs. Margie Jenkins, nursery icon, passed away recently at 98 years young enjoying horticulture events to the very end. This sweet lady dedicated her life to horticulture and many of the plants she so lovingly cultivated will always remind us of her love of horticulture. This is the kind of person that true gardeners look up to as their idol.

Hopefully the plants you received in last year's release are thriving and you're ready to rate them on the release report contained in this issue. Remember you must bring your completed evaluation form in order to receive this year's release plants. We are a research society and each

person's report is most important in order to provide valid information on the plants.

Seems as if we have been having Spring weather during most of winter so far; therefore, the plants are very confused, so I feel by the time Spring truly arrives we won't have many of our usual blooms. Our dear friend and LSHR former President, Dr. Jim Racca, has been having serious health issues. I'm hoping that his and my health will be rejuvenated in Spring just as Mother Nature brings on new beginnings.

—Norman

TREASURER'S REPORT

Seems the older I get, the quicker the weeks fly! There are only a few weeks until our plant release and luncheon on March 14 with details in this issue.

Our fine noon luncheon will be at Petroleum Club with great speaker, Adam Black. Review menu and details in this *Compost Pile* and please make reservations by March 6. Guests are always welcome at the luncheon, and it's such a bargain at \$25.

This year instead of bringing a hard-copy *Compost Pile*, you will be issued a printed card on plant

release morning to present to registration. Your plant release box number will be marked on your card, which will give you access to your plants. LSHR policy is to have a record of every box issued. This year issuing the cards will be simple and fast.

The board is eager to break last year's auction record of \$5,800! The money is used to award scholarships, research grants and purchase new plant releases.

Anxious to see everyone and to have a great day with all the plant folks!

— JoAnn Pugh

IN MEMORIAM

LSHR member **Josephine Muller Shanks** passed away peacefully at home in Houston on November 25, 2019. She was known as the "Iris Lady" and loved introducing people to the beauty of Louisiana irises. Two hybridizers named new irises after her: 'Empress Josephine' and 'Josephine Shanks.'

Life member **Ruth Sheller** passed away Jan 1, 2020, at age 98 in Red Lodge, Montana.