President’s annual report

The Botanical Society of America is strong and vibrant thanks to the hard work of its loyal members and dedicated staff. The American Journal of Botany continues to be a pre-eminent outlet for high quality research in plant sciences, and the Society continues to lead important initiatives like PlantingScience and to enhance the services it provides to members. My report can highlight only a few of the more important accomplishments.

In 2009 the Special Libraries Association recognized the American Journal of Botany as one of the ten most influential journals in biology and biomedicine over the last 100 years, and the journal continues to get stronger. Under the guidance of our Editor-in-Chief, Judy Jernstedt, and with the invaluable help of our Managing Editor, Amy McPherson, and Production Editor, Richard Hund, AJB launched an innovative, online-only section of the journal, AJB Primer Notes & Protocols in the Plant Sciences. This new section promises rapid turnaround for short papers (< 1200 words) describing primer sequences for microsatellites or other genetic markers or new protocols for isolating, visualizing, or scoring such markers. Since its debut in the January 2010 issue, 18 Primer Notes have appeared with authors from North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. This fall AJB staff will also submit an application to have the journal indexed in MedLine. We are very hopeful that the application will be successful, as it will bolster our efforts to broaden the reach of AJB and to further enhance its reputation and impact. But it is not only AJB that has been evolving. Under the watchful eye of our Editor, Marshall Sundberg, Plant Science Bulletin began accepting papers for peer review in late 2009.

The Society plays a leading role in PlantingScience (http://www.plantingscience.org/), an online community that pairs university and college scientists (graduate students and faculty) with teachers and students in middle schools and high schools around the country and engages them in hands-on scientific experiments. Recent projects have included experiments that investigate the genetics of plant height, how soil nutrients affect pedicel length, and how mycorrhizae affect the growth of plants. PlantingScience has even gone international; there is now a test site in the Netherlands (http://nl.plantingscience.org/).

The Botanical Society of America is a scientific and educational organization devoted to the fundamental study of the form, function, diversity, evolution and uses of plants and their interactions within the biosphere.
Society for the Study of Evolution, the Crop Science Society of America, the American Fern Society, the Soil Science Society of America, the Society for Economic Botany, the Ecological Society of America, and the American Society of Agronomy.

A year ago the economy was reeling from the worst recession since the 1930s, yet the Society remained financially sound throughout the crisis. Years of dedicated effort led by the Jack Horner as Chair of the Investment Committee helped ensure that the Society’s investments weathered the storm with relatively little damage. And because of the outstanding quality of the American Journal of Botany, revenue from institutional subscriptions remained relatively constant even in the face of mounting pressures on library budgets. Even in this challenging environment, careful management of expenses allowed the Society to maintain its services to members. Our Executive Director, Bill Dahl, continues both to look carefully for ways the Society can provide services more efficiently, both to members of the Society and to sister societies. For example, the Society now provides membership and meetings management services for both the Society for Economic Botany and the Society for the Study of Evolution. By all accounts, both societies are very satisfied with the services we provide, and the revenue from our contracts with these societies provides the Botanical Society with additional resources to serve our members and the broader botanical community.

The Society has also been deeply engaged in a variety of activities related to science policy. Last fall, for example, Chris Haufler (At-large Director – Education) and Bill Dahl participated in several conference calls involving staff members of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to discuss federal plans for support of science education. In a different vein, Judy Jernstedt and I sent a letter to Senators Lieberman and Cornyn to express our concern about the requirement that all federally supported research be made freely available no more than 6 months after publication. I sent a similar letter on behalf of the Society to OSTP, commenting on its request for comment on public access policies for federal science and technology funding agencies. In April, I sent another letter on behalf of the Society to OSTP, this one responding to a request for information on “Grand Challenges of the 21st Century” and to the House Science Committee on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education as part of the reauthorization of America COMPETES. In the comments to OSTP I pointed out the critical role that plant sciences and professional societies play in restoring American leadership in fundamental research. I also pointed to recent reports from the National Academy of Sciences identifying the pressing need for basic research in the biological sciences and the synergy between basic and applied research. The letter to the House Science Committee focused on the role of federal agencies in STEM education, strategies to enhance dissemination of K-12 STEM education materials, and the sustainability of STEM education programs. The letter highlighted PlantingScience as

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1 Long-time members of the Society will recognize the Investment Committee as what used to be called the Financial Advisory Committee. At last year’s meeting, the Council voted to split the responsibilities for financial management of the Society into the Investment Committee, which oversees the Society’s investments, and a Finance Committee, which monitors and helps to plan the Society’s operating budget.

one model that could be widely adopted both to enhance dissemination and to enhance sustainability of STEM education programs.³

In short, it has been a busy, but productive year for our Society. Our membership remains vibrant, the American Journal of Botany and the Plant Science Bulletin remain healthy and continue to grow, our services to members and to sister societies continue to improve, and our ability to represent the interests of botanists to policymakers continues to increase. The future of our Society is bright, and it has been a privilege to serve as your president for the past year.

Respectfully submitted,

Kent E. Holsinger, President

P.S. If you’re a member of Facebook, don’t forget to become a fan of BSA. If you’re on Twitter follow BSA there. And even if you don’t want to become part of the whole social media “thing”, you can check out the photos on the BSA Flickr page without joining Flickr. You’ll find buttons to take you to the right places on the lower left corner of our home page.

³ I should point out that I did not write any of these letters by myself. First drafts of many were written by other members of the Board. Even when I wrote the first draft myself, the final text was edited and approved by the entire Board before it was submitted.