2015 Economic Botany Section Report to BSA Council
Submitted by Allison Miller (Saint Louis University, amille75@slu.edu)
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2014 - 2015 ACTIVITIES:

1. **Botany 2014 (Boise, ID) Activities.** The Economic Botany Section completed the following activities in 2014:

   a. **Contributed Papers: Economic Botany:** ten papers were presented in the Economic Botany section in 2014.

   b. **Contributed Posters: Economic Botany:** two posters were contributed in the Economic Botany section in 2014.

   c. **Awards:** Two student travel awards ($500 each) were given in 2014.
      i. Jacob Washburn, University of Missouri ($500)
      ii. Lauren Frazee, Rutgers University ($500)

   d. **Business meeting:** Monday, July 29, 2014 at 4:00pm the Economic Botany business meeting was held. The meeting was led by Wendy Applequist and Laura Klein.

2. **Publication of a special issue in the American Journal of Botany: Speaking of food: connecting basic and applied plant science.** Following on the Speaking of food: connecting basic and applied science symposium/colloquium which was held in 2013 in New Orleans, presenters and others were solicited to submit articles for a Special Issue in the American Journal of Botany. The special issue was published in October 2014 and included eighteen manuscripts addressing a range of basic science questions with relevance for food plants and sustainable agriculture. The co-editors, Allison Miller, Briana Gross, and Toby Kellogg, wrote and introduction to the issue.

   The Speaking of Food special issue was received well and generated some publicity for the American Journal of Botany and the Botanical Society of America. In December 2014 Current Biology published a three and a half page feature on the AJB “Speaking of Food” issue (http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982214014924). In addition, the special issue was featured in the AAAS Eureka Alert (http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2014-10/ajob-bab101414.php).

3. **Botany 2015 Boise ID Activities and looking ahead.**

   a. **Contributed Papers: Economic Botany:** ten papers will be presented in the Economic Botany section in 2015 in Edmonton.
b. **Contributed Posters:** Economic Botany: **six posters** will be contributed in the Economic Botany section in 2015 in Edmonton.

c. **New Symposium.** Nyree Zerega, Rachel Meyer, and Allison Miller organized a symposium entitled “Underutilized crops for secure and green futures.” The organizers secured support from ASPT/BSA Systematics section, BSA Genetics, Tropical Biology, BSAS Economic Botany, and Northwestern University. It should be noted that Nyree Zerega and Rachel Meyer did the heavy lifting on this symposium and really put together an outstanding lineup of speakers. The speakers in the symposium will be:

- Nanci Ross
- Colin Khoury
- Sandra Knapp
- Elliot Gardner
- Allen Van Deynze
- Amy Lawton-Rauh

d. **Awards:** Two student travel awards ($300 each) were awarded in 2014. Initially an award was offered to Araik Sinayan, but he declined because he couldn’t attend the meeting. The 2015 awardees were:

- Colin Khoury, CIAT ($300)
- Elliot Gardener, Northwestern University ($300)

e. **Business meeting:** The annual business meeting will be held on Monday, July 27, 2015 at 4:00pm. A new Section leader will be elected at this meeting.

**Additional thoughts:** The Economic Botany section is an important component of the Botanical Society of America that focuses on the interaction of plants and people. This broad section includes a variety of topics (ethnobotany, domestication, relationships of crops to their wild relatives, phytochemistry of medicinal plants, etc.) and a broad variety of approaches (ethnobotany, genetics, systematics, chemistry, morphology, development etc.). This breadth is a strength of the section in that it is inherently interdisciplinary and annually brings together scientists with different backgrounds and different areas of expertise. However, the breadth is occasionally a weakness as attendance and submission to the section is sometimes low because scientists choose to present within their specific discipline (e.g., systematics).

Over the past three years the Economic Botany section has had a series of conversations about its identity and nature. One persistent element of the discussion is that the Economic Botany section, as currently circumscribed, includes both ethnobotany and other fields of plant biology for example work in crop plants/crop wild relatives. Both are certainly valuable aspects of economic
botany, but ethnobotany and agriculture are quite different scientific communities, asking often non-overlapping question, and using distinct suites of tools. One possibility moving forward is to identify subsections within Economic Botany, once focused on Ethnobotany, and the other focused more on agricultural issues. This new section could be called something like “Botany and Agriculture” or even something as simple as “Agriculture subsection of Economic Botany”. One exciting possibility of dividing Economic Botany into subsections is that it opens up room to eventually include more topics under Economic Botany, such as horticulture, invasive plants, and weeds. This may or may not happen, but it might be nice to begin building for enhanced flexibility in this area. The idea would be to retain an Economic Botany section, so that scientists working on aspects of the interaction of plants and people within the BSA would remain united, but that disciplines under that umbrella would be able to expand, hopefully attracting new members to BSA and new presenters to Economic Botany.

The Botanical Society, associated societies, and their members are making important advances in our basic knowledge of plants. This information is inherently valuable to our understanding of the natural world. It is becoming increasingly clear that the science of this society is critical for many pressing societal issues, such as sustainable agriculture, conservation, and medicine. An expanded Economic Botany section, with specialized subsections (e.g., ethnobotany, agriculture), may offer one way to explicitly highlight connections between the basic science of the BSA and its broader applications, and to attract new member over time. This and related topics will be discussed in the Economic Botany Business Section Meeting on Monday July 27, 2015.

Respectfully submitted by Allison Miller.