PLANT SCIENCE IS INTEGRATIVE, TOO: SICB 2021 AND THE NEW(ISH) DIVISION OF BOTANY

The annual meeting of the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology (SICB) took place in virtual fashion from 3 January through 28 February 2021 using Pathable, the same web platform employed for Botany 2020. This was the second SICB conference since the establishment of the SICB Division of Botany as the first plant-themed division of the 118-year-old society formerly known as the American Society of Zoologists.

Spearheaded by SICB President Beth Brainerd, support for a Division of Botany (DOB) reached its tipping point at SICB 2019. Following that conference, DOB was approved as SICB’s 12th division by the executive committee and the first officers appointed ahead of SICB 2020 in Austin, Texas, U.S.A. (Fig. 1). At that time DOB had quickly grown to 50+ “charter members”, with membership in the division more than doubling in the next year heading into SICB 2021.

SICB 2021 featured more than 40 talks/posters presented on plant-related science, most of the work intentionally integrated into themed sessions unrelated to taxonomic placement – including talks on carnivorous plants presented as part of the “Biology of Sticky” session. DOB did, however, sponsor two special sessions featuring botanical talks:

(1) The annual Rising Star in Organismal Botany Best Student Talk award session, an outstanding set of talks resulting in the selection of Haley Branch (Fig. 2); plus a complementary set of excellent posters in the DOB Best Student Poster competition resulting in the selection of Jenna Miladin (Fig. 3).

(2) “Evolution and Biogeography of Islands: A Session in Honor of Dr. Vicki Funk”, an event consisting of six talks bookended by tributes from the late Dr. Funk’s friends and collaborators Warren Wagner and Sterling Keeley.

As we now head toward SICB 2022 in Phoenix, Arizona, U.S.A. (January 2022), DOB hopes to continue adding members – but we are also aware that SICB has not historically been a society that is “on the radar” of most of those in the plant sciences. The benefits of adding this society to one’s annual dues payments include an excellent mid-sized and mid-year conference (that is exceptionally student-friendly) and member access to two journals looking for...
organism-based plant-related manuscripts (Integrative and Comparative Biology and the new open-access Integrated Organismal Biology). The primary reason to join, however, is right there in the name: integrative biology. At a time when funding agencies such as the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) are prioritizing integrative approaches and many higher education institutions are revising their biology curricula to do the same, we can maximize the impact of and engagement with our research by bringing more plants to the “animal people”. Most importantly, doing this may reduce the potential for the further marginalization of botanical content as introductory biology courses are reimagined through an integrative lens.

**Christopher T. Martine**
Chair, SICB Division of Botany, Department of Biology,
Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, 17837, U.S.A.,
ctm015@bucknell.edu

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**Fig. 3.** Tweet announcing Jenna Miladin, undergraduate student at Christopher Newport University as winner of the 2021 DOB Best Student Poster award.