

NEWS AND COMMENTS

SOCIETY OF ETHNOBIOLOGY CONFERENCE COORDINATOR

The Editorial Board, at its annual meeting on May 7, 1985, created a new position within the Society—Conference Coordinator. Jan Timbrook was asked to assume this position and the Board is pleased to announce that she has accepted. Part of the responsibilities of this position is to assist the local committee in the planning of the annual Conference. Guidelines and a time schedule are in the final stages of development. Since Jan will be in frequent contact with the local committee each year, she can be contacted for information: Jan Timbrook, Department of Anthropology, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 2559 Puesta Del Sol Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93105. Telephone: (805) 682-4711.

GUINDON



"Cow's gone crazy! She believes they're going to kill and eat everybody but the dog."

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The School of American Research announces four post-doctoral resident fellowships to be awarded for the 1986/87 academic year to scholars in anthropology and related disciplines. These fellowships are supported by the Weatherhead Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities—and provide a monthly stipend, housing, a private study, and the time, space and quiet needed for creative research. The application deadline is the first of November, 1985. Write to the Resident Scholar Program there, at P.O. Box 2188, 660 Garcia Street, Santa Fe, NM 87501, or call Susan Bodenstein at (505) 982-4987.

Native Seeds/S.E.A.R.C.H. has issued its catalog of "Ancient Seeds for Modern Needs" (available at 3950 West New York Drive, Tucson, AZ 85745). Native Seeds/S.E.A.R.C.H. [What does the acronym stand for?] is a non-profit outfit dedicated to preserving the Native American crop heritage, with a primary focus on the Greater Southwest. "We are proud to present to you the largest selection ever offered of native crop seedstocks from the Greater Southwest. These ancient crop varieties are nonhybrid, open pollinated seed, some having remarkable levels of tolerance to drought, heat, salinity, root knot nematodes and certain pathogens; others have higher protein and mineral contents than related commercial varieties . . . In order that this native American crop heritage will not be forgotten nor abandoned, we are offering small samples of these seeds for distribution to anyone interested in diversifying their gardens." Associate memberships are solicited at \$10/year (members receive *The Seedhead News*) to help support this effort. Seeds available include amaranths, a large variety of *Phaseolus* beans and of corn (including *Zea diploperennis*), chiles, squashes, cotton, gourds, and tobacco.

GENE SPLICING UPDATE

As noted in this column in the last issue, genetic engineering experiments are the target of a crusade by Jeremy Rifkin, who fears that unexpected and unfortunate consequences may result from the release of such "unnatural" organisms into the environment. Rifkin sued the National Institutes of Health in 1983 to halt the field testing of genetically modified bacteria (designed to prevent frost formation on plants) by University of California researchers. In May of 1984 Federal District Judge John Sirica enjoined NIH from permitting the experiment until an environmental assessment was completed. The U.S. Court of Appeals last February reviewed Sirica's decision and upheld his ruling in part. Notably, the Appeals Court noted that "NIH has not yet displayed the rigorous attention to environmental concerns demanded by law, and that the deficiency rests in NIH's complete failure to consider the possibility of various environmental effects" if the bacteria proved capable of dispersal and survival in nature. Still at issue is whether each experiment should require a rather cursory "environmental assessment" or whether a comprehensive environmental impact statement needs to be prepared covering the potential impact of the release of altered organisms in general. In response, biotechnology firms are submitting their proposals directly to the Environmental Protection Agency for review. (Marjorie Sun, *Science*, 15 March 1985, pg. 1321.)

ETHNOBIOLOGY IN THE NEWS

"Frog-leg Cuisine Blamed for Environmental Crisis": this *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* headline last March 31 caught my eye. I read further. It seems that the frogs' legs consumed by epicures in Europe, Australia, and the United States—from some 200 million frogs annually—are not supplied by harvesting the bullfrogs that infest your local wetland. Rather, the preferred species are *Rana tigerina* and *R. hexadactyla*, most imported from Bangladesh and India, with substantial imports as well from Indonesia. The World Wildlife Fund is concerned at the prospects for ecological catastrophe that may result from this decimation of local anuran populations. "Their natural prey—insects—are breeding out of control . . . , triggering an ecological chain reaction and posing a serious threat to agriculture To combat the insects, farmers . . . are using more and more . . . insecticides such as DDT, . . . banned in the West."

Donald Ugent, specialist in ancient potato studies at Southern Illinois University, claims to have discovered remains of cultivated potatoes 10,000 years old, equal in age to the earliest remains of domesticated wheat from the Near East. The discovery in the Chilca Canyon of Peru is from a desert area that was once fertile. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 26 March 1985.)

Wade Davis, a Harvard University botany student, has recently returned from Haiti having "unmasked [the] mystery behind zombies" (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 24 March 1985). According to Davis, "Zombies are not people who have risen from the dead. Instead, they are people who have been given a drug that mimics death." Davis, whose studies were sponsored by the Harvard Botanical Museum, attributes this effect to the poison tetrodotoxin, extracted from pufferfish. It is "500 times more powerful than cyanide A drop on the head of a pin is enough to kill." This poison is incorporated in a formula which includes parts from toads, sea worms, lizards, tarantulas, and human bones. Ground into the skins of victims, it results in paralysis and a drastic lowering of blood pressure within six hours. Paralyzed victims are buried, then disinterred and administered an "antidote," which Davis believes serves rather to induce amnesia and psychological dependency in the victim. This drastic treatment is normally reserved for those accused and convicted before a voodoo tribunal of violations of voodoo codes prescribed by this "sophisticated religion with African roots." Details to be published in the *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*.

CREATIVE APPLIED ETHNOZOOLOGY DEPARTMENT

From an ad in *Alaska Magazine*, April 1985, advertising "Dr. Juice One Drop Fish Scent" (available from Blue Fox Tackle Company, 645 North Emerson, Cambridge, MN 55008): "In 1978 an American anthropologist named Dr. Gregory Bambanek, M.D., was studying the primitive people of Central America. They are the mixed blood descendants of English pirates, Mayan Indians and African slaves. There is powerful magic there . . . He befriended the medicine man, Dzacar, who not only healed the sick but kept the healthy well-fed. In this meat-poor tribe, Dzacar was the number one fisherman . . . Dzacar's magic was in his uncanny ability to catch fish on nothing but a hook, line and a shred of cloth. With this unlikely rig, he would pole out into the tropical river and return with snook, tarpon and bandarootoo . . . It was one such night that Dr. Gregory Bambanek, himself a fisherman, went along with Dzacar and first got a whiff of the potent stuff Dzacar had on that lure . . . What Bambanek brought home was a secret formulation of scents derived from living jungle plants, fish and animals. Back in America, in his laboratory, he analyzed the chemical makeup of the potion . . . *Kairomones* were the scientific base of the formula. To the gamefish, this hormonal substance indicates a living organism such as live baitfish . . . By dialing in other hormonal "communicators" he found he could send other messages like a hot line to the fish's brain . . . He added *Fear Pheromones*, the smell of fear given off by prey species that attracts and excites predators. He added *Schooling Pheromones*, the scent baitfish use to home in on their school and gamefish use to find them. He added traces of *Sex Pheromones* which, in small doses, make gamefish very aggressive and territorial . . . And finally he added *Attractant Amino Acids* which camouflage the repellent scent of human finger prints without alerting the fish to any smell out of the ordinary . . . Incredibly, in a dilution of one part per 10,000,000,000, Dr. Juice Fish Scent will register its powerful messages of food, fear and sexual aggression deep in the fish's brain, triggering the desired strike response . . . Outdoor Life called it, 'a far cry from the run-of-the-mill, anise oil based, licorice-smelling fish 'attractors' ' . . . Available in 9 formulations for the 9 most popular species of gamefish. Unless you have a taste for bandarootoo." [This ad copy strikes me as a literary analog of Dr. Juice Fish Scent, designed to lure fishermen, "registering powerful messages . . . in the [fisherman's] brain . . . [and] triggering the desired strike response," ed.]