

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

With this issue the editorial staff of the *Journal* is introducing a new feature—**SHORT COMMUNICATIONS**. Robert Bye, a member of the Board, kindly agreed to write the initial article as an example of the type of material we are seeking for this column. For the time being, kindly send submissions for **SHORT COMMUNICATIONS** to the Editor of the *Journal of Ethnobiology*.

Datura and Castaneda.—As I reevaluate *Datura* in ethnobotanical sources, I am taken back to the period of my initial interests in ethnobotany during which Carlos Castaneda's "classic" book, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1969, Ballantine, New York), appeared. According to the text, Carlos experimented with "jimson weed" four times. The species, *Datura innoxia*, was not documented by a voucher specimen, hardly surprising if one accepts the hypothesis of Richard de Mille (1978, *Castaneda's Journey: The Power and the Allegory*, Capra Press, Santa Barbara, CA) that Carlos-Ethnography is a myth and that no legitimate field work was done. Where did Castaneda obtain the clue to inquire about *Datura*?

According to de Mille (1978:114), Castaneda was asked by Michael Harner who came across a reference to the Yaqui use of a *Datura* ointment rubbed on the stomach to see visions. Unfortunately, Harner lost the reference. Not only does de Mille doubt Harner's claim that such a reference exists, but the investigative writer also quotes Dr. Edward Spicer who states that he knows ". . . of no information or reference concerning Yaqui using *datura* (sic!)." In his revised edition, de Mille (1978:115) cites one possible reference (José Pérez de Barradas, 1957, *Plantas Mágicas Americanas*, Instituto Sahagún (Madrid), pp. 239, 310-312) which is based upon Victor Aloisius Reko, brother of the respected Mexican botanist, Blas Pablo Reko.

I suggest that two more readily available and standard Mexican publications were probably the sources, these being the books of Maximino Martínez: 1) *Las Plantas Útiles de la Flora Mexicana* (first edition 1928; third edition 1959, Ediciones Botas, México). These books, which are widely distributed, would surely be consulted by anyone working on useful and medicinal Mexican plants.

Martínez (1959:572) reports *Datura stramonium* L. "and other species" (including *D. innoxia* from Sonora) as the **toloache**. The Yaquis "and other tribes of the north" employ the plant for various purposes. An ointment prepared from the ground seeds and leaves of the plant is smeared onto the stomach after which the subjects become intoxicated and see visions. ("Ademas hacen una especie de unguento con semillas y hojas molidas, para untarselo en el estomago, con lo cual tambien se intoxican y ven visiones.")

The source of Martínez' report is unknown. It may be related to V. Reko's writings on **toloachi**. Three of Reko's articles (1928, 1932 and 1936) cited by I.K. Langman (1964, *A Selected Guide to the Literature on the Flowering Plants of Mexico*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, p. 621) discuss **toloachi**. Reko (1936, *Magische Gifte*, Ferdinand Enke Verlag, Stuttgart, pp. 80-83) discusses the uses of **toloachi** (unidentified) in Veracruz and Guanajuato as well as among the Mayo and Yaqui Indians of Sonora.

Some people have questioned the reliability of V. Reko's work and writings. Most botanists of Mexico were active in their formation of the Mexican Society of Botany and deposited their books and specimens at the Institute of Biology of the National University of Mexico. A search at this institute failed to reveal any original notes, herbarium specimens or researchers familiar with his botanical contributions.

Five species of *Datura* occur in southern Sonora and could be candidates for **toloache**. Two widely distributed species with documented uses in northern Mexico and adjacent United States are *D. stramonium* L. and *D. wrightii* Regel. Another common species in the area is *D. discolor* Bernh. Two species restricted to the northwestern coastal plain

and barrancas that cut into the Sierra Madre Occidental to the east are *D. lanosa* Barclay ex Bye and *D. reburra* Barclay.

Consequently, it is difficult to verify the use of *Datura* by the Yaqui Indians and to determine the species reputedly employed. The reference that stimulated Harner to have Castaneda query Don Juan about *Datura* was probably one of the classic economic botany books by Martínez. Also, the report of *Datura* use among the Yaquis may have originated from Victor Reko. Because of the lack of voucher specimens and corroborative studies, the use and identification of *toloache* in Sonora need to be investigated.

The thesis of de Mille's is that Castaneda's Don Juan is fiction rather than ethnographic fact. Regardless of the final verdict, Donald Lee Williams (1981, *Border Crossings: A Psychological Perspective on Carlos Cataneda's Path of Knowledge*, Inner City Books, Toronto) argues that the process of the path of knowledge is quite real. His comments on *Datura* from a Jungian viewpoint add another dimension to *toloache* in the human experience.

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