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2023 Elizabeth Anne Bartholomew Award
Alan S. Weakley

The Elizabeth Anne Bartholomew Award is presented by the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society (SABS) in honor of the life of Elizabeth Ann Bartholomew, an unassuming and devoted Southeastern botanist, educator, and herbarium curator, and it formally recognizes "... individuals who have distinguished themselves in professional and public service that advances our knowledge and appreciation of ... plants and their scientific, cultural, and aesthetic values, and/or exceptional service to the Society." Alan S. Weakley, Director of the University of North Carolina Herbarium and Adjunct Associate Professor, is the recipient of this award for 2023. Dr. Weakley's extraordinary career is marked by his dedication to wide-ranging botanical study of the southeastern United States and beyond. The following tribute is interspersed with some direct quotes from the many letters the committee received in support of this nomination.

"How many people do any of us know who have a high level of expertise in both plant taxonomy and ecology? Add to that systematics, biogeography, conservation biology, history, classical music ... the list goes on."

Alan's career interests began in childhood: he grew up in Springfield, Virginia, and his parents, raised on farms, were conversant with the natural history of the area. Encouraged by his mother and aunt, Alan spent a lot of time as a child hiking, birding, and botanizing at his grandparents' property in the Shenandoah Valley. By the time Alan started undergraduate study at University of North Carolina,

Alan S. Weakley

he had developed a wide-range of interests (e.g., music, literature, zoology), but botany became his main focus, inspired by James Massey's local flora class (which Alan now teaches there!) and Al Radford's plant taxonomy and ecology courses. These influential mentors both incorporated conservation issues as part of their pedagogy, a synthesis that had particular influence on Alan's professional goals.

After receiving his B.A. degree in Botany and Comparative Literature from the University of North Carolina in 1978, Alan worked as a botanist/ecologist for the next 24 years in various positions for Coastal Zone Resources, the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, The Nature Conservancy, and NatureServe, with focus on applied conservation biology. Alan accepted his current position as the Director of the Herbarium at the University of North Carolina in 2002 and completed his Ph.D. in the Environment from Duke University in 2005.

"... few people have a chance to see their work, a true labor of love in Alan's case, affect so many other people—scientists and laypeople alike—within their lifetimes."

Throughout his career, Alan's educational, scientific, and outreach service has been intricately linked by his dedication to botany in the southeastern United States: species biology/systematics, biogeography/floristics, and classification/management of natural communities. He is author/coauthor of 17 popular and scientific books, countless book chapters, and over 70 peer-reviewed scientific papers. Many are collaborative projects, such as the *Flora of Virginia*, which reflect Alan's facility in working successfully with an extensive network of colleagues in academia, non-profits, and governmental agencies. He has been recipient of many awards related to his work (e.g., Thomas Jefferson Award for Conservation), and his research is well-funded.

"[Alan's] achievements thus far should forever be acknowledged as great as early southeastern stalwarts such as Small, Radford, Godfrey, and Mohr."

Alan is now best known throughout the botanical community for his own dynamic-digital magnum-opus, *Flora of the Southeastern United States*. The comprehensive flora has developed from a modest beginning over three decades ago, during the first phase of his career. He then supervised field botanists (in North Carolina) tasked with verifying locations of rare plants. Alan started to provide them with updated keys to the 1968 Radford et al. *Manual of the Vascular Flora of the Carolinas*, and he added more and more genera and species as the years progressed.

These keys, eventually distributed to colleagues throughout the Southeast, represent the initiation of the *Southeastern Flora* and also the basis of his Ph.D. dissertation. Originally the *Flora* was focused only on the Carolinas but the project underwent gradual geographic "scope creep" to include adjacent states. Alan maintains that every state added was "just another 400 to 500 species, which seemed so doable." However, step by step, the project ultimately encompassed the unglaciated Southeast and some other areas that necessitated "rounding off" to include political boundaries (e.g., state borders). Due to popular demand, the electronic flora is now updated annually. With each revision, Alan relentlessly updates taxonomic concepts and extends geographical coverage—a monumental (and on-going) achievement. This work is highly regarded and utilized by all botanists all over the Southeast and beyond. We can now even obtain a version tailored to our own particular state and also use a *Flora* mobile app to identify over 5,800 vascular plants!

"... Alan epitomizes everything a conservationist should be. He leads by example, he is humble, he is a wonderful and kind person to work with, a first-class scientist, and a generational leader in our understanding of the flora."

Aside from his research activities, Alan teaches formal courses (e.g., Local Flora at the University of North Carolina) and has supervised seven Ph.D. students, six M.S. students, and several undergraduate honors students**.** He has also served as instructor for diverse amateur groups: adult education classes, field trips, and presentations on general botany, rare species, and conservation. His service to SABS includes his terms on the Editorial Board of *Castanea* and

society Member-at-Large (2007-2009), plus his numerous popular newsletter articles for the SABS Newsletter *Chinquapin* (notably his popular series "Taxonomic advisory!"). His resume has a long list of service to other societies, as well, including the Vegetation Panel for the Ecological Society of America and Chair of the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program Advisory Committee.

Beyond extensive service to the wider community, Alan's colleagues emphasize also how he has inspired each of them with his enthusiasm, humor, and insights. For such a busy and renowned scientist, he is remarkably unpretentious and very generous with his time. In this way, he gently prods and encourages us all to continue our collective contributions to the flora of the Southeast and its conservation.

—*Wendy B. Zomlefer, Chair, Bartholomew Award Committee; University of Georgia*