TRIBUTE

Rooted in *Rhodora*

In 1991, my second year as an undergraduate at the College of the Atlantic (COA), I took a course on plant systematics with my advisor and botany professor, the late Craig Greene (In Memoriam 2004, *Rhodora* 106:77–79). Craig used papers published in *Rhodora* in all his upper-division botany courses, exposing many budding botanists (including myself) to research on the flora of eastern North America. Craig was a Harvard-trained botanist who carried out his PhD dissertation research on the systematics of *Calamagrostis* (Poaceae) in eastern North America. He studied under Reed C. Rollins, who had served as the Editor-in-Chief of *Rhodora* (1950–1961). Craig's discovery of *Calamagrostis pickeringii* in Maine (the first documented record of the species in the state) was published in *Rhodora* (Greene 1987, *Rhodora* 89:333–336), and the botanical surveys he led at Acadia National Park for more than two decades with COA students (myself included) and local plant enthusiasts led to "Vascular flora of the Acadia National Park region, Maine," which won the Merritt Lyndon Fernald Award for the best paper published in *Rhodora* in 2005 (Greene et al. 2005, *Rhodora* 107:117–185).

The first paper I read in *Rhodora* (while taking plant systematics with Craig) was by the late William "Bill" H. Drury, a celebrated ecologist and ornithologist at COA (In Memoriam 1992, *Rhodora* 94:395). The paper was titled "Rare species of plants" (Drury 1980, *Rhodora* 82:3–48), and the entire issue (no. 829), highlighting papers presented at a symposium on rare and endangered plants of New England during the 755th meeting of the New England Botanical Club (NEBC), first piqued my interest in rarity and endemism in plants. This and other papers published in the issue by prominent botanists, including G. Ledyard Stebbins (82:77–86) and Richard B. Primack (82:87–95), shaped my undergraduate senior project on rarity and endemism in the Sri Lankan flora (1994, cosupervised by Craig and Neela De Zoysa, current councilor, New England Botanical Society [NEBS]) and my ongoing research on plants of "harsh" substrates in North America and beyond. I still hold on to my treasured folder of 18 papers from this issue, photocopied in 1991 from Craig's personal copy. Bill Drury was also a Harvard-trained biologist who carried out geobotanical research for his PhD dissertation. Bill was an active member of the NEBC for 45 years, serving as vice president (1962–1965) and president (1965–1968). I took Bill's ecology-focused classes at COA, and his passion for geobotany clearly influenced my early interests in geoecology, a field I have passionately pursued since.

Ten years after graduating from COA, after carrying out graduate and postgraduate research on serpentine soil-plant relations at the University of British Columbia and Stanford University, respectively, I returned to my alma mater to fill the big shoes left behind by the untimely passing of Craig, my undergraduate advisor, mentor, and friend.

RHODORA, Vol. 125, No. 1003–1004, pp. 222–224, 2023

DOI: 10.3119/24-30

To celebrate his role as Editor-in-Chief of *Rhodora*, Anne Favolise created this whimsical image of Nishanta Rajakaruna in 2017. It combines a photo of him teaching and a photo of rhodora in a wetland habitat in Columbia, Maine.

Having learned botany from Craig and experienced firsthand how effective his training of students was, I adopted many of his techniques while teaching botany at COA (2004–2008; 2010–2016). During my 10 years as a faculty member of botany, 13 undergraduate students coauthored 13 papers in *Rhodora*, highlighting their senior projects or independent study research on the geoecology of Maine, including a paper that received an honorable mention for the Merritt Lyndon Fernald Award for the best paper published in *Rhodora* in 2009 (Rajakaruna et al. 2009, *Rhodora* 111:417–447). Several of these papers were coauthored by another long-term NEBS member and adjunct faculty member at COA, Dr. Fred Olday, who taught lichenology and bryology at COA for almost two decades. Student coauthors, who first got a taste for botanical research at COA and published their undergraduate research in *Rhodora*, are now active at academic and research institutions across the country, including at the New York Botanical Garden's Steere Herbarium and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Dr. Naveed Davoodian (Royal Botanic Garden, Victoria, Australia), who carried out his

senior project with me and published his research in another regional journal (Davoodian et al. 2012, *Northeastern Naturalist* 19:517–526), was recently awarded the Merritt Lyndon Fernald Award for the best paper published in *Rhodora* in 2022 (Asher and Davoodian 2022 [publ. 2023], *Rhodora* 124:1–16) for undergraduate research he supervised during his time as a graduate student at the City University of New York and the New York Botanical Garden. Thus, the COA-*Rhodora* legacy lives on through students who were trained by *Rhodora* enthusiasts at COA and who are now training their own students and publishing research in *Rhodora.*

Rhodora was key to my growth as a teacher-scholar and contributed to the training of generations of COA students who have gone on to botany-focused careers. Given *Rhodora*'s regional focus and strong emphasis on natural history–based research that can be carried out by undergraduate students, it provides an unparalleled venue for publishing student-led research carried out in eastern North America. During my years at COA, papers in *Rhodora* were often the first peer-reviewed publications botany students read (like I did in 1991), and the journal was where students first published their research. *Rhodora* was also where I published the first undergraduate senior project I supervised as a faculty member (Harris et al. 2007, *Rhodora* 109:430–447). I am grateful for all the opportunities I have had to engage with *Rhodora* since the first paper I read in 1991, including an opportunity to guide the journal as Editor-in-Chief for five years (2015–2019). I wish *Rhodora* a happy 125th birthday and hope to resurrect my long-term relationship with both *Rhodora* and COA upon my eventual retirement and return to Maine.

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