Jan. 2013 Meeting, Native Plant Project:

Tues., January 22, 2013 : at 7:30pm

"Native Morning Glories and their Affinities to Tropical Mexico"

by Dr. Andrew McDonald, Professor of Botany at UTPA, Edinburg. Dr. McDonald’s interests include Plant Systematics, Biogeography, Ethnobotany and Conservation. He has conducted botanical studies in many parts of the world. Dr. McDonald’s presentation will feature some of the most striking blooming plants in the RGV.

His Ph.D. dissertation was “Biosystematics of Ipomoea section Tricolor (Convolvulaceae).”

at Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border, (in Gibson Park), Weslaco. 956-969-2475
This seems the perfect time to point out our favorite authors, who have received an award from the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT). Here are our friends, displaying the plaques they received in honor of the “2012 Donovan Stewart Correll Memorial Award for scientific writing in the field of the native flora of Texas,” Ken King (left) and Alfred Richardson (right), for our all-time favorite fieldguide: *Plants of Deep South Texas.*

More Plants of the South Texas Sand Sheet

**Introduction**—
Ken and Al have not ceased their efforts to find new and interesting plants, and Al is compiling information on these previously unpublished local plants for a follow-up publication.

As we worked together to prepare the November Sabal on “Plants of the South Texas Sand Sheet,” we realized that a number of interesting plants they’ve found on the sandsheet would fill another newsletter (or more).

Using Al’s photos and text which the authors have compiled on each plant, we provide a glimpse at plants you may have never encountered or even seen a picture of. We hope that you’ll be pleased to see some rarely-glimpsed local natives.

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**Petite Plant**

**Family:** Saxifragaceae

**Scientific Name:** *Lepuropetalon spatulatum*

**Habit:** Very small hairless annuals, usually growing in rounded patches about 5/8” broad but variable.

**Leaves:** Alternate, without petioles, the blades spatulate, up to 1/4” long.

**Flowers:** Radial, very small, but large in proportion to the plant, borne singly near the stem ends; sepals 5, 1/16” or slightly longer; petals 5, white tiny, smaller than the sepals.

**Fruit:** Capsules about 1/16” tall; seeds pitted.

**Bloom Period:** Winter, spring.

**Distribution:** Starr County.

Both Leperopetalon and Drosera (see p. 3) grow together in a localized area of the Encinitas 40,000 acres ranch where 3 counties (Jim Hogg, Starr and Brooks) meet. There are extensive inland sand dunes and several microenvironments.
Dwarf Sundew

Family: Droseraceae

Scientific Name: Drosera brevifolia  
[D. annua, D. leucantha]

Habit: Tiny annual insectivorous herbs.

Bloom Period: Spring, summer.

(See p.204 of Plants of Deep South Texas.)

In general these plants are tiny, from 1/4 to 3/8” in width. The photos seen here are greatly enlarged to show detail.

Sundews capture tiny insects with the sticky material which can be seen here on the ends of glandular hairs of the leaves. When the insect is captured, the hairs slowly bend toward the center of the leaf blade, where the insect is digested. (Photos from same general area as Lepuropetalon from previous page.)

These were found among the extensive sand dunes. Water percolates through the porous sand and seeps out in a narrow band at the base of the dunes creating a microhabitat that provides constant moisture and little nutrients.

The sundews were growing near such a seep, where they received moisture over a longer period of time after the rains ended. They require a moist habitat.

The carnivorous nature of the sundews provides the nitrogen needed that is absent in the wet sand, allowing sundews a competitive edge over other more aggressive and larger plant species.

There are similar habitats ranging farther south, which makes it likely that Drosera brevifolia also grows in Starr, and possibly in Hidalgo, counties. It would be very easy to overlook them due to their small size.
Small Papillosus, Yellow Flowered Alicoche

Family: Cactaceae

Scientific Name: Echinocereus papillosus var. angusticeps

Habit: Plants forming clumps. Stems spiny, erect or leaning, up to 8” long, up to 2” broad or more, with ribs divided into nodules (tubercles).

Fruit: Greenish, spiny.

Bloom Period: Spring.

Distribution: Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr counties.

Variety angusticeps is endemic to Texas, limited to red sandy soils of northwestern Hidalgo County and northeastern Starr County.

(See p. 164 in Plants of Deep South Texas.)

Photo on bottom right was taken on 3/12/2011 at Ken King’s home, where the plant is in cultivation.
Low-Growing or Beach Prickly Pear

Family: Cactaceae

Scientific Name: 

*Opuntia macrorhiza*

Habit: Stems flattened, jointed, erect at first but falling over with 3 or more joints. Spines yellow or tan, some sturdy and some (glochids) brittle and barbed.

Fruit: Red, about 3 1/2”.

Bloom Period: Spring.

Distribution: Cameron, Hidalgo, Willacy and Starr counties.

This species occurs in sandy soils near the coast and also inland. The reddish center of the flower distinguishes this species from the more common Texas prickly pear, *O. engelmannii* var. *lindheimeri*. illustrated on bottom right.

(See p. 171 in *Plants of Deep South Texas.*)
Pigmyleaf

Family: Caryophyllaceae
Scientific Name: *Loeflingia squarrosa*

Habit: Small fleshy rounded plants, usually with glandular hairs, not more than 6" tall.

Leaves: Crowded, narrow, about 1/4" long.

Flowers: Cleistogamous (self-fertilizing without opening); sepals 5, similar to the leaves but a little shorter; petals minute, 3 to 5 or none.

Fruit: Capsules 3-angled, about 1/8" tall.

Bloom Period: Spring.

Distribution: Hidalgo County.

Comments: Pigmyleaf has not previously been reported for our area. It grows in sandy soils. The plants remind one of a juniper seedling.

Photographed on Hunke Ranch, 4-26-10. Enlarged.

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Coastal Plain Heliotrope

Family: Boraginaceae
Scientific Name: *Heliotropium racemosum*

Habit: Sprawling, hairy herbs.

Flowers: Corollas are almost 5/8” broad, which makes these photos almost life-size. Typical coils of the Heliotropes aren’t always visible in this species.

Bloom Period: Spring, summer, fall.

This is a Texas endemic which prefers sandy soils. The flowers are much larger than our other heliotropes. *(See p. 146 in *Plants of Deep South Texas*.)

Photographed in Hidalgo county north of Hwy 490 on 5-26-2012.

Note hairy leaves and bloom size.
The Sabal, January 2013, Vol. 30 No. 1

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Upcoming Speakers and Topics:
February 26, 2013 – Chris Hathcock –
“The Natural Zones of the Lower Rio Grande Valley,”
Specific Geological Regions of the RGV and the Plants Thriving There.

Other Meeting Dates: March 26, April 23, May 28, 2013
Please note date changes: errors printed in last issue.
The Native Plant Project (NPP) has no paid staff or facilities. NPP is supported entirely by memberships and contributions. Anyone interested in native plants is invited to join. Members receive 8 issues of The Sabal newsletter per year in which they are informed of all project activities and meetings.

Meetings are held at:
Valley Nature Center, 301 S. Border, Weslaco, TX.

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NPP fieldtrip participants at Boca Chica beach, 11/30/2012.

NPP January meeting and speaker on:
January 22, 2013 at 7:30pm –
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