INTRODUCTION

Oak Travels and Thoughts

The pages you are about to turn will transport you across the planet in the wake of many oak adventures, discoveries, and, more generally, interesting and happy moments spent together.

From South Korea (Souček) to southwestern France for an Oak Study Day and an Oak Open Days event with a hop into northern Spain (Chassé; Chassé and Haddock), to England for another round of Oak Open Days (Slessor et al.) to a Tour of California (Bellili) and, finally, to a Tour of the Carolinas with a bit of Georgia mixed in (Leszczynski): oak enthusiasts roaming about all over the world. And Cameron shares with us the voyage, in the largest sense of the word, of Aimé Bonpland's encounter with the oaks of South America.

Hipp gives us a glimpse of the first chapter of *Oak Origins: From Acorns to Species and the Tree of Life*, which includes a summary of the prehistoric role of *Homo sapiens* in oak migration while Riely et al. present preliminary results of a study in southern New England comparing the performance in an assisted migration scenario of native and non-native oak species. Equally on the subject of conservation, Sisson et al. provide results of a study aimed to assess the impact of climate-change-induced stressors on *Quercus austrina*.

Good news from around the world with recently described species from Mexico: Coombes with *Q. purhepecha*, and Valencia-A. with *Q. salasiae*; and, from China, Deng with *Q. zhekunii*. Jablonski and Russell report on the first cultivar to be described from Korea, along with a few new ones from Europe.

New names, new species and everything in between from which interesting new questions arise, as exposed by Giseburt et al., focused on intersectional hybrids between certain oaks of northern California/southern Oregon.

Backs provides a comprehensive review of recent studies about what defines these crazy little things called "species" in light of the syngameon concept which tells us that, yes, species do exchange genetic material, and, yes, they do maintain their integrity. And she asks an important question: "In light of this, is hybridization a threat to endangered species, or are we seeing examples of oak adaptation mechanisms that have sustained

them for millions of years? Should the focus change from saving an individual endangered species to preserving the habitat of which that species is a part?"

As I began to write this Introduction, a flock of common cranes flew over our house, spreading across the Arboretum on their way back north, as common cranes have been doing ever since we've been here. Indeed, as they have been doing for a couple of million years, only not always exactly in the same direction and not always at the same time of the year. And this immediately brought to mind a passage of *Oak Origins* (Hipp 2024, pp. 199-200):

"The history of oaks illustrates that species are begotten of extinction. Oaks have been the recipients of a long string of good fortune, survivors despite more than 50 million years of dramatic climate change. Born on the cusp of a spike in temperatures, then sweeping the continents as the tropical forests were extirpated from much of the Northern Hemisphere, they have survived by being in the right place at the right time, with the right set of tools. Oaks migrated rapidly as the glaciers receded, swapped genes with other survivors, and repeatedly solved the problems of freezing temperatures, drought, fire, and inundation. If we had been there to see them trundling across North America and Eurasia during the Eocene, we might have tried to stop them."

Just as the year 2024 was filled with oak adventures, so is 2025: Oak Open Days in Australia, Belgium, New Zealand, and the UK. And, of course, as I'm sure you all know by now, the 11th International Oak Society Conference, in Oaxaca, Mexico, is an event not to be missed. More detailed information about all of these events can be found on our website.

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