

CROSSROADS IN THE CONCRETE JUNGLE

Experiences and Explorations of Urban Plants and People

One-day International Symposium, Subsequent Workshop, and Field Trip

Background:

We plan to start a global working group and network (Worldwide Urban Plant Evolution and Education Network) centered at Rutgers University with international researchers to collaborate long-term on how the evolution and distribution of spontaneous plants in urban, temperate areas across the globe have been and will be affected by human migration, local and global climate change, and increased urbanization. In particular we want to focus on biodiversity, biogeography, and evolution research, as well as formal and informal educational opportunities. The evolution and natural history of urban plants are closely linked to cultural histories of urbanized areas, ethnobotanical uses by various ethnicities, global phylogenetic evolution of plant diversity, and major trade and migration routes, so interdisciplinarity is a must in addressing this type of important research questions.

Goal and Planning:

We have acquired some funding for an interdisciplinary 1-day international symposium and subsequent workshop to be held at Rutgers 22-23 September. The main goal of the symposium and workshops is to kick off the formation of the worldwide network by discussing needs and goals, inspire interdisciplinary research and build connections, and share knowledge and ideas across disciplinary borders.

Location:

Cook Campus, Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Symposium Thursday 22 September:

We have decided on a program model for the symposium to enhance and enforce dialogue and interdisciplinarity that preliminary includes 1) three-four invited speakers on four themes. A combined lunch and poster session where current research is highlighted will make it possible for undergrads, graduate students, faculty and other researchers to present their research broadly. After the four invited speakers there will be a few shorter talks on current interdisciplinary results and methods from select local participants to share developed 'best practices', 'fantastic collaborations', and 'unexpected synergies'. In the afternoon, there will be a panel discussion focused on networking and collaboration among humanistic, social, and life sciences within this research topic, how to address challenges opportunities, and best practices for building up a worldwide cross-disciplinary network to enhance research in urban flora as it relates to these research fields. We expect about 50-100 people to attend, and will invite participants from a broad set of fields and agencies and institutions, including parks departments, state agencies, and educators outside of university settings.

Workshop Friday 23 September:

The workshop will be focused on building up the worldwide network, so it will primarily include people that have expressed interest in filling strong roles in this new endeavor. This will include the invited special speakers from the symposium and the PIs of this proposal, as well as additional people we have identified or who have self-identified while signing up for the symposium.

Fieldtrip Saturday 24 September:

Exploring urban flora, research programs, and education efforts in the NYC, New Jersey, and Philadelphia metropolitan areas.

More updates soon!