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About the Institute

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.

INACCURACY IN BOTANICAL PUBLICATION

Carleton R. Ball

unpublished

Refused by Madrono

1944

Recently, I noted with much interest the published compilation of botanical exploration in Alaska and Yukon Territories, by Dr. Eric Hulten (1). Being presently engaged on a monograph of American willows, such a publication had possibilities of great helpfulness. In reading the items, however, I noted numerous errors. On coming to the item covering the two collecting trips made by Dr. and Mrs. Wm. A. Setchell, in 1931 and 1932, here is what I found. This item contains 23 lines and approximately 275 words.

Four errors in the spelling of proper names: "Charleton" for Carleton, "Benett" for Bennett, "Carmaks" for Carmacks, and "Mandroño" for Madrono. My given name was correctly spelled on all the Setchell labels and in my Madrono paper⁽²⁾, both referred to by Hulten. The place names were correctly spelled on the labels.

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Several errors in statements of fact were noted. 1. The items begin with ~~in~~ the inclusive year-dates and the Setchell item is dated 1932, not 1931-1932. On p. 339, Hulten says: "Acc. to Ball, Setchell collected in Alaska in 1931 also, but I have only seen specimens collected in 1932". Earlier (p. 293), he had stated that Setchell collected *Salix* in 1932. He admits taking many data from Standley's manuscript Flora of Alaska, but refuses to accept my statement on Setchell in 1931.

2. He states that 619 numbers of *Salix* were collected by the Setchells, taking this ~~statement~~ fact from my paper wherein I stated distinctly that the 619 numbers represented the two years, 1931 and 1932. Hulten ascribes them all to 1932.

3. In listing 19 localities ~~where~~ at which he says the Setchells collected, he credits the work to 1939, not 1932. As a matter of fact, the Setchells collected ~~at~~ 268 numbers at 39 localities in 1931 and 351 numbers at 59 localities in 1932. The 19 mentioned by Hulten are fewer than 20% of the total, and less than one-third of the number visited in 1932.

Sent to Dr. Mason (Madrono) on Dec. 29, 1943.

4. Hulten states that the 619 numbers of Salix were collected for me. This is not true, as they were collected primarily for the University of California and the first set of specimens is deposited in the University herbarium.

5. He states that "The specimens are in Dr. Ball's herbarium in Univ. Calif. and duplicates in many other herbaria". This is in error, because my herbarium is not at the Univ. of California but ^{has been} ~~is~~ quartered in the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture since 1935.

6. Hulten ~~EX~~ complains that "(The route is not quite clear, as the labels use a peculiar system of double dates, which do not always coincide)". A master label was printed for each section of the long trip and the inclusive dates for that section were printed in the label heading. The actual date of collection of each number collected in the few-day period was typed on the labels with other pertinent data. If there are cases where the typed date does not fall within the inclusive printed dates, it would be a typographical error. I have seen none such.

7. Hulten makes one peculiar and incorrect assumption. After following the 1932 itinerary down the Yukon River to Circle, he says: "From this place one of the collectors, to judge from the labels, seems to have taken the Steese Highway to Fairbanks and then the railway to Nenana during June 19-July 1, while the other continued down the river (to) June 25 Holy Cross and returning July 3 to Nenana". This is an entirely gratuitous assumption. The successive collection dates on the labels show clearly the itinerary taken and a glance at the map shows how it was done. Both Dr. and Mrs. Satchell continued by boat down the Yukon from Circle to Tanana, took the train to Fairbanks, returned by train to Tanana, collecting en route in both directions, caught their boat and continued their trip down the Yukon as far as Holy Cross, back up the river to Tanana, and then by train to Fairbanks ~~or~~ again. They then took the Steese Highway from Fairbanks to Circle and return (July 4-6), collecting in both directions. They then back-tracked to Nenana, collected in McKinley Natl. Park, and then went home via the ~~Alaska~~ Railroad.

and then went home via the Alaska Railroad.

A fact that probably helped to confuse Hulten was that the lower Yukon River, The Tanana River, and the Steese Highway, were round trips. Collecting was done while both going and coming, usually at different localities but occasionally at the same place. Following the map and the successive collection dates shows clearly what took place.

8. Finally, Hulten, in referring to my Madrone paper (2) says: "He ^{there} ~~mappe~~ ~~xxxx~~ supposes that Setchell collected five species of Salix not previously known from Alaska. As a matter of fact, all of them had been gathered there by earlier collectors". This may be true. But reputable authors, when denying the truth of statements made by others, are accustomed to submit proof of their assertions. This author submits none. I said that the five species named were "not previously known from Alaska". I have not yet seen, in any herbarium, ~~any specimen~~ an Alaska specimen of any one of the five species which had been collected earlier than Dr. Setchell's material and also recognized for what it was. Specimens ~~xxxx~~ collected, but unnamed, and unrecognized and/or undistributed, really are not "known".

If this is the record for one 23-line item out of a total of nearly 57 pages (about 2250 lines), the working value of the entire contribution might seem to be somewhat questionable.

(1). Hulten, Eric. History of botanical exploration in Alaska and Yukon Territories from the time of their discovery to 1940, Bot. Notis. 1940 (3): 289-346. 1 folded map. 1940.

(2). Ball, Carleton R. Dr. Setchell and Alaska Willows. Madrone 5 (7): 331-332. pl. 24 (portr.). July, 1940.

December 29, 1943

Dr. H. L. Mason, Herbarium,
Dept. Botany, Univ. California,
Berkeley, California.

Dear Dr. Mason:

Here is a little spiel designed for Madrono. It may not be worth while and it may not be in the right tone.

But Hulten has messed up every thing he has undertaken in Alaskan botany and his projected Flora of Alaska and Yukon will be "sumpin awful" if he does not change. Like most foreign botanists working on American areas or material, he is in too much of a hurry to be either complete or accurate. Furthermore, he has a most lively imagination concerning species, both those already published and those he proposes. The result is confusion worse confounded. It seems time to give him a gentle calling down.

With all good wishes, I am

Cordially Yours,

Am working at the monograph slowly, and
doing my natural-resource volume at the
same time.

Carleton R. Ball
Collaborator

MADRONO

A WEST AMERICAN JOURNAL OF BOTANY

Published by the California Botanical Society, Inc.

4004 Life Sciences Building, University of California, Berkeley, California.

January 6, 1944

Dr. Carleton R. Ball
Collaborator, Extension Service
U.S.D.A., Washington, D.C.

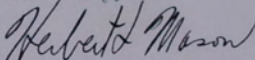
Dear Dr. Ball:

Your paper, "Inaccuracy in Botanical Publication", has been received and will be submitted to members of the Editorial Board for consideration.

I agree with you that such inaccuracies as you cite are inexcusable and such a paper as Hultén's will only serve to confuse future botanists.

With best wishes for the New Year,

Sincerely,



Herbert L. Mason
Chairman, Editorial Board

HLM:db

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DEPARTMENT OF BOTANY
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

November 9, 1944

Dr. Carleton R. Ball
Collaborator, Extension Service
U.S.D.A., Washington, D.C.

Dear Dr. Ball:

Your paper, "Inaccuracy in Botanical Publication" has been submitted to several members of the Editorial Board and they all agree with you that something ought to be done to correct past errors of this type, and, we hope to prevent future mistakes. They feel, however, that the article is a bit abrupt and could be "toned down" and still make its points sufficiently clear. One member of the editorial board writes as follows:

"At times all of us come across work so inaccurate and misleading in minor detail that we boil over, and sometimes against our better judgments we write articles or letters we are not sure we should publish or send. There must be a better and fairer method of handling the situation, and the following one is suggested: a carefully- and tactfully-written letter to Hultén pointing out the significant errors and supplying additional data concerning the Setchell Expedition. Then, if Hultén is the right sort, he will lose no time in correcting the errors in his next publication on the subject. Both authors will benefit in reputation, and the way will be clear for future cooperation. If, on the other hand, Hultén should not be receptive to courteous suggestions and corrections, some brief summary of the Setchell Expedition accompanied by a restrained reference to Hultén's publication may be in order. Minor errors like those in spelling or insignificant slips in statistics may be too unimportant or too obvious to any informed reader to be much improved by re-emphasis."

The manuscript is, therefore, being returned to you. We will be glad to have a revised version submitted for publication in Madrono.

We hope that both you and Mrs. Ball are well and that you are having time to work on the monograph.

The "old-timers" on the Herbarium staff join me in sending greetings to you.

Sincerely,

Herbert L. Mason

Herbert L. Mason
Curator of the Herbarium

Dr. Herbert L. Mason,
Editor, Madrono,
Dept. Botany, Univ. California,
Berkeley, California.

November 22, 1944

Dear Dr. Mason;

Yours of N v. 9 received promptly. Your Edit.-Bd. member apparently missed the point completely. I was discussing a work of 157 pages, full of errors from end to end. I illustrated the point by analysis of one item of 57 lines and containing an amazing number of errors. He assumes that I am peeved because an item in which I had some concern was not well done. Does he think that Hulten, on receiving a tactfully-worded letter, would do over his whole history of bot. explor. in Alaska, eliminating the hundreds (or thousands) of errors?

Hulten's work, like that of Floderus, always has been full of errors and false assumptions. He thrives on it. And no one must criticize him in print! Why should any one do honest work? Hulten pays, and gets honors.

Cordially yours,

Carleton R. Ball
Collaborator

by an abundance of errors and false assumptions of the type I listed. It seems too bad that no one is permitted to publish any criticism or exposure of such continuing conditions. It is done commonly in other branches of natural science.

Cordially yours,

Carleton R. Ball
Collaborator.

MADRONO

PUBLISHED BY THE CALIFORNIA BOTANICAL SOCIETY, INC.

4004 LIFE SCIENCES BUILDING, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
BERKELEY, 4, CALIFORNIA

December 29, 1944

Dr. Carleton R. Ball
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Extension Service
Washington, D.C.

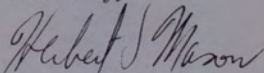
Dear Dr. Ball:

I am sorry that you felt that our return of your manuscript criticising Hultén's work constituted a refusal to publish criticism of the work. In the first paragraph, we said that all of the editors to whom the paper was submitted "agree with you that something ought to be done to correct past errors of this type, and, we hope, to prevent future mistakes."

Hultén seems firmly established in his slap-dash methods; so the procedure suggested by the editor whom we quoted in our last letter is undoubtedly not feasible. Since you said in your letter of submittal that, "it may not be in the right tone", I gather that you, too, felt that your paper was rather abrupt. Rather than attempt to "tone it down" a bit ourselves, we returned it to you in the hope that you would submit a revised version.

We had hoped to see you and Mrs. Ball in California before now. The Bay Area seems to be turning into a haven for retired botanists. I hear that Dr. Gleason is now planning to join the company.

Sincerely,



Herbert L. Mason
Chairman, Editorial Board

HLM:db