Weakley honored for contributions to plant conservation

CHAPEL HILL—Dr. Alan Weakley, herbarium director at the North Carolina Botanical Garden of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, has won the 2015 Star Award from the Center for Plant Conservation for exemplary service to further our knowledge of plants. His tireless work and exceptional skill in documenting the flora of the United States Southeast is what prompted the selection of Weakley as this year’s winner. The award was presented on April 17 in conjunction with the Center for Plant Conservation’s National Meeting, held this year at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, and recognizes individuals who demonstrate the concern, cooperation and personal investment needed to conserve imperiled native plants.

“Dr. Weakley is well known for his expertise in taxonomy and floristics. His monumental contributions to our knowledge of plants in the US Southeast cannot be overstated,” said Dr. John Clark, president and executive director of the Center for Plant Conservation.

Weakley has worked as a botanist and ecologist for the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program, and as regional and chief ecologist for The Nature Conservancy and NatureServe. He is author of Flora of the Southern and Mid-Atlantic States and co-author of Flora of Virginia, which has received five awards, including the Thomas Jefferson Award for Conservation. He also has authored over 100 journal articles and book chapters.

“The basis for all conservation work begins with a clear picture of diversity in a region; in this way, Alan has laid the very foundation for conservation work in one of the most diverse temperate plant regions on the planet,” Clark said.

“Alan Weakley’s tireless work has revealed that the Southeastern U.S. is an extraordinarily rich area for plant diversity, comparable with the West in its numerous endemics, several additional ones being discovered every year. His work is notable for its accuracy and the outstanding way he has kept the online material up to date,” said Peter H. Raven, chairman of the board of trustees for the Center for Plant Conservation.

Weakley is active with the Flora of North America project and the United States National Vegetation Classification, chairs advisory committees for the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program and North Carolina Plant Conservation Program, and is a co-founder of the Carolina Vegetation Survey. In 2015 he became the second annual NatureServe Larry Morse Botany Fellow.

The Center for Plant Conservation is a non-profit organization whose mission is to ensure stewardship of imperiled native plants. It has established a network of nearly 40 leading botanical institutions across the country. By developing standards and guidance, conducting hands-on work and raising awareness, the Center and its partners strive to accomplish the research and restoration work needed to return these plants to their natural habitats. The Center coordinates the National Collection of Endangered Plants, securing seed from more than 750 of America’s most vulnerable native plants, and is working on more than 200 restoration projects. The Center’s program is managed by their national office in St. Louis, Mo. For additional information about the Center for Plant Conservation, visit www.centerforplantconservation.org.

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