



The Drifting Seed

December 1, 2001

Vol. 7, No. 3

THE DRIFTING SEED

A triannual *Newsletter* covering seeds and fruits dispersed by tropical currents and the people who collect and study them.

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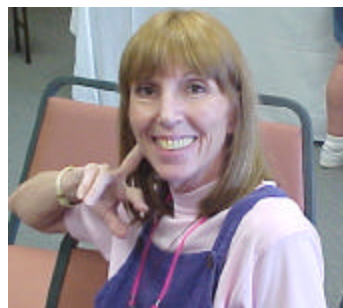
This issue is a tribute and memorial to the life of Cathie K atz.

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"You may not be given long to live, but live as long as you are given."
Greg Anderson

"I loved the urgency. I loved the compelling nature of the days. I was luckier than anyone deserved--to have this joy of living fully for the 1st time, day after day without knowing how many days were left. It made each one the biggest, best, and brightest I'd ever experienced."
Cathie Katz, from her unfinished book, "Beaches and Beyond"

“Cathie, with much grace, joy, and “Little Larry,” gave me the time to complete my life’s project. Her memory and publications will remain a strong and vital part of my life: a life far better and richer. She remains a strong beacon in my life. I miss you my friend.”—Bob Gunn

“Like many of us beaners, I knew Cathie for only a short time—since just before my first visit to Florida for the 3^d Symposium. I had met Cathie at the end of an internet trail. . . I wanted her to know how crucially important our friendship was to me—how I looked forward to the gray winters here on the Texas coast, to my annual trip to Florida to renew friendships and share in a kind of camaraderie that comes perhaps only once in a lifetime. The ocean of warmth, enthusiasm, and grace given to me by the friends I have made because of Cathie is vast and immeasurable. I think, and I hope, that Cathie understood/understands how vital her spirit still is—in the wrack line, the dunes, the soft colors of the shore, and in the sea breeze I feel on my porch in the mornings. (We) are granted bits and pieces of her spirit to carry with us in our journeys.”—Cathy Yow

“To Cathie, the driftseed lover, collector, illustrator and educator who brought so many of us together to share, learn, and enjoy a common interest in driftseeds; I thank you.”—Ruth Smith

“We don’t know what seed Drifters want to name a not be anything with a *Mucuna cathea*, or ‘Cathie’s-bean.’ I can a rare and beautiful one: lives. I know her spirit will beachwalk I make from ball-cap,” you’ll live in the have touched.”—Ed Perry



it will be yet, but the bean after her, and it will scientific name like *Canavalia katzii*. It will be assure you the seed will be like Cathie was in all of our be with me on every now on. “Lady in the white hearts of all those lives you

“Trying to capture the like trying to capture a put it into a Coke bottle. I have never had such an loving remarks made to me about any person, like I have of Cathie Katz. I have a file folder full of e-mail messages, faxes, and poems dropped off at my office, along with notes taken from telephone conversations.”—Pastor Bud Everett

“For myself personally I know that this is not the end...She is not gone....simple reminders....a walk on the beach, birds singing, waves crashing, and all our treasures from the sea are reminders that her spirit lives on. Just as we give gifts to our friends, nature gives us precious gifts if we only take time to notice them as Cathie taught us through her writings and friendship.”—Sue Bradley

We Will All Miss You Very Much!

Cathie Katz
May 14th, 1948—November 22nd, 2001

“I was rich, if not in money, in sunny hours and summer days, and spent them lavishly.”
Henry David Thoreau

FROM ED

First, I want to thank all of you who made donations to this newsletter in memory of Cathie. Not only does it reaffirm the need for all of us sea-beaners around the world to exchange information, but it shows the impact that Cathie has had on each and every one of us, and the need for this newsletter to continue, even after her passing. This truly was Cathie's child; an expression of her beautiful person, and a gift to this world. Her shoes will be hard to fill, but it was her wish that I take the reigns of this project and keep it going. It is an honor to me to continue this, and a show of gratitude for a friendship that changed my life. This newsletter will continue to be an expression of Cathie's spirit, and a connection of all the wonderful people it has brought together in the last seven years through its publishing.

I am sure there are many people to thank, and many that Cathie would have thanked if she could. Paul Mikkelsen will be carrying on www.seabean.com, and he has included a wonderful memorial to Cathie's life. Marge Bell put together a slide show of this last year's symposium that Paul has also included on the website. It is a must to see for all those who couldn't attend, and a great re-live for all those that were there.

If there was an e-mail, story, or question that didn't get answered in the last few months, please get back to us, either through the website e-mail address, or through the Atlantic Press address.

Sea Bean

A quiet walk along the beach
Seagulls swoop
As I stop to reach,
Ah, yes, it's a bean, tropical and exotic
A treasure for the comber, round and
hypnotic.

All dull and black
With a band around the middle
Like a black belt on a fat man,
I scoop it up with sheer delight
And turn it over in my hand.

Tactile, magical, mystical seed
Where have you come from
And where do you lead?
To the grinder and polisher

Then to leather and bead.

I'll hold you and caress you
And find your best face,
It is then I will release you
From your more common place.

Creation of beauty, art for the eye
A necklace of rarity for those that know
You are from the Amazon, or Africa
Or the Orinoco Flow.

Just a bean, just a seed?
No, a rainforest gem,
Given freely from nature,
To renourish her need.

Deborah Wright Trachtman, copyright 2001



MORE ON FOSSIL GHOST CRABS

By John Beerensson
Merritt Island, Florida

I am often asked how I know the age of the fossil ghost crabs found on Brevard County, Florida's beaches. It is a simple question with a most difficult answer. The September 2001 issue of *National Geographic* has an excellent article on "How Old Is It?". Their explanation of the various "clocks," or methods used for dating now makes this question a little easier to answer.

The clock most people are familiar with, carbon 14, did not work on the fossil crabs for one reason—carbon 14 dating is valid only if the object tested is less than 40,000 years old. Another method had to be used.

Amino acid racemization was the clock used by Roger Portell, Curator, Invertebrate Paleontology, Florida Museum of Natural History, University of Florida. So with the help of the *National Geographic* article, let me try to explain this method.

Amino acid racemization worked perfectly for the crabs. It is a dating technique valid for shell and other biocarbonates, giving accurate readings for objects 500 to 300,000 years old. Amino acids, the building blocks of proteins, are overwhelmingly left-handed. Over time they flip, or tend to become right-handed. In other words, in objects of recent birth, the vast majority of the amino acids are left-handed. In objects 300,000 years old, the vast majority of amino acids are right-handed. Determining the ratio of left to right-handedness yields the age.

However, it really is not that simple. Heat can speed up the flipping process, and cold can slow it down. Climate analysis can deal with these variables. Since the climate changes in Brevard County are known for the last 125,000 years, this knowledge can be factored into the equation.

The bottom line is that amino acid racemization is an excellent clock for dating the crabs, and with few exceptions, the age of these crabs consistently measures between 100,000 to 125,000 years old.



Editor's note: We thank John Beerensson for sharing all his knowledge about the coquina fossilized ghost crabs and other objects we find in Brevard County, Florida. We also look forward to the upcoming publication by Roger Portell on these unique objects of Florida's coastline, and possibly hearing Roger speak at the Symposium in 2002!

THE LUCKY BEAN

By John Dennis Sr.
11719 Beechwood Sreet
Princess Anne, Maryland 21853

Ever since the first issue appeared on May 1, 1995, *The Drifting Seed* has been an invaluable source of information about tropical drift seeds and related subjects. Since earlier issues are not readily available to many members, I am selecting articles in these issues for comment. It will be seen that a wide variety of subjects are treated and that some of them are international in scope.

Starting with the very first volume, there is an amusing article by Bob Gunn on Robert (Bob) Mossman. Bob Mossman was a pioneer collector who lived in West Palm Beach and collected drift seeds on ocean front beaches in Palm Beach. From 1961 to 1969 Mossman collected 5,000 hard-coated sea-beans. He had a habit of placing liquor bottles (neck down) at exact spots where sea-beans were found. He gave Bob his entire collection. This gave Bob useful material to work with.

In the second issue of volume 3, there is an interesting article by Gerhard Cadee of the Netherlands on tropical drift disseminules from the Netherlands coast. It turns out that of the many species found, all were derived from activities of humans. Lost from shipping or refuse thrown overboard were such species as mango, coconut, Brazilnut, peanut and endocarps of several species of palms.

In the first issue of volume 2, which appeared in 1996, there is a well-illustrated article by Peter Zies on drift seeds used in toys and games. This is a use that most of us never think of. Still other uses are reported upon by Ruth Smith in an article in the May, 1998 issue. She goes into such uses as necklaces, charms, and as prayer beads.

In my column in the December 1998 issue, I tell of surprisingly large numbers of ivory-nut palm endocarps on beaches near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. It was determined that the ivory-nuts imported for use as buttons and curios had been lost from shipping.

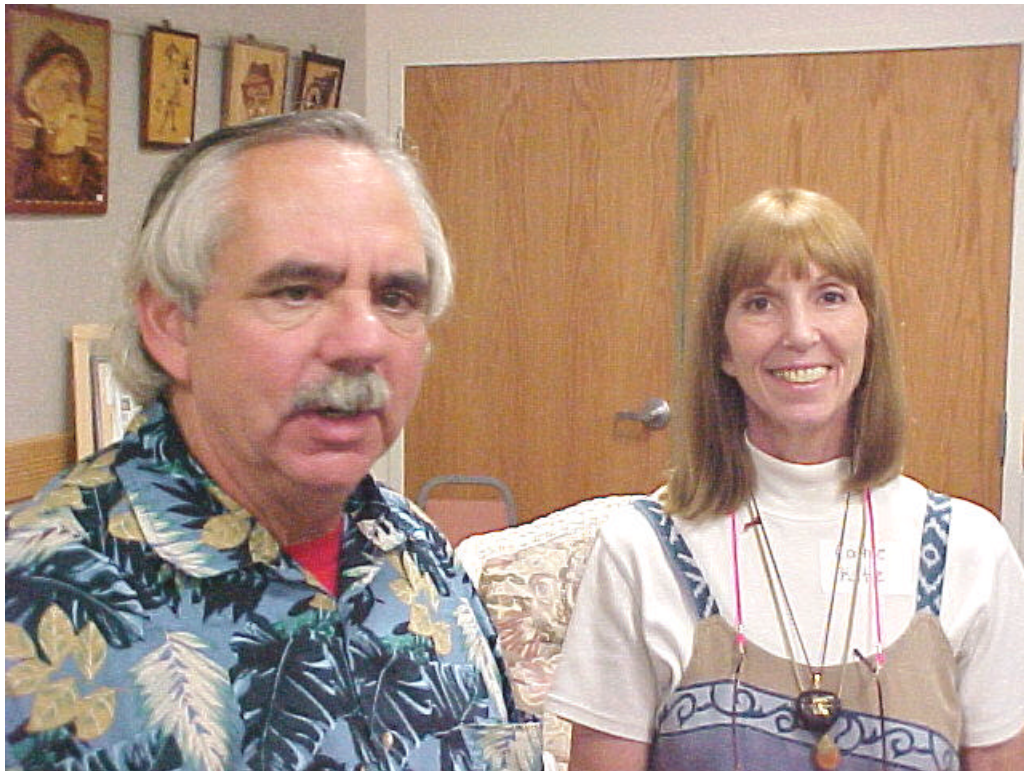
There seems to be no end for the uses of sea-beans, past and present. In the September 1998 issue there is an article by Charles E. Nelson of Outwell, England on sea-beans as vesta boxes and snuff boxes. Vesta boxes were formerly used to hold matches. Up until about 1900, snuff-taking was a common habit. Snuff boxes were commonly made from sea hearts. The boxes were often hinged and lined with silver.

The sea-bean collector should not overlook temperate drift seeds. Some of them are nice-looking and a number are long distance travelers. I tell about the seeds in my column in the September 2000 issue. The sea pea, a tiny member of the bean family, has made trans-Atlantic crossings from America to Europe. The American lotus has marble-sized seed that have a sheen and are capable of floating for over 15 years. Hickories and walnuts have good floating capacities and perform long ocean journeys. I found a water hickory nut on an Isles of Scilly beach. The tree grows in the southeastern United States.

THE LUCKY BEAN by John Dennis (continued)

Probably the most common of the hard-coated sea-beans are the true sea-beans or the *Mucunas*; they are called hamburger beans in the US and horse-eye bean in Europe. In his column in the December 2000 issue, Ed Perry tells about these colorful seeds. There are several species that drift and one or two that defy identification. From vines in the American tropics, they are carried by ocean currents to eastern North America and Europe. The *Mucunas* can be grown in warmer parts of Florida.

I have referred to only a few of the informative articles that have appeared in *The Drifting Seed*. From the very beginning, Cathie Katz has been editor and publisher. Bob Gunn is an advisor and columnist. The remaining three columnists are Ed Perry, Peter Zies, and myself. The publication is distributed to over 20 countries and receives articles and notes from correspondents all over the world. If the information you are looking for is not in any of the books on sea-beans, it is in *The Drifting Seed*.



Pictured here are Jack Rudloe, this year's featured speaker at the Sixth Annual International Sea-Bean Symposium and Beachcomber's Festival, and a very happy Cathie Katz.

"The past few years have made us aware as we have never been before of the depth of kinship among all living organisms . . . so all life is akin, and our kinship is much closer than we had ever imagined."

George Wald in "The Search for Common Ground", in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science II* (1966)

The Inside Story – Tropical Almonds (*Terminalia catappa*) (Or, How not to make a meal from a pile of them)

By Cathy Yow

As I live 15 miles from the nearest grocery store, I am endlessly searching for ways to avoid the trip by feeding myself off the land—the beach and marshes. I've made broth from coquinas collected in the swash zone and veggies from cattail shoots from the roadside ditches—and even a gooey mess out of marsh mallow roots. Recently, I picked up my copy of Euell Gibbons' "Beachcomber's Handbook" to see what else I could munch on from the neighborhood. In it, I found several pages devoted to the tropical almond, which he calls "Indian Almond." As he had a tropical almond tree shading his hut, he was able to harvest fresh almonds for himself and have leftovers to sell to a local grocer. With diligence, he harvested about a quart of kernels from a bushel of the seeds, not however without some difficulty in getting the small kernels out of their corky outsides. Nevertheless, he was successful enough to make a tropical filling and his own "Beachcomber's Candy" (recipe below).

Anyone who has tried to open a tropical almond will discover immediate difficulty, as the corky coat is thick and troublesome. Gibbons technique is as follows:

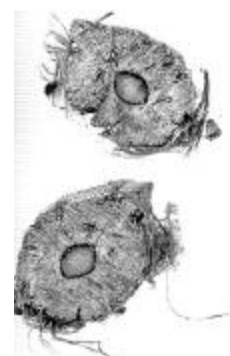
"There is a definite technique to shelling these nuts that must be learned. Three longitudinal seams divide the almond approximately into thirds. If you strike a heavy knife into one of these seams, then give the nut a twist with the other hand, one third of the corky fruit will pop out, revealing the comparatively small edible seed. However, only one of the three sections will pop out in this way, so you have to learn which seam to strike and which way to twist the nut."

My own attempt at striking and twisting was a miserable and frustrating failure, so I turned to a more efficient way of opening them; I sliced them in half with a band saw.

Of the 34 almonds I sliced open, only 13 of the kernels were in edible condition. A small snack! The remaining number did not qualify as edible due to spoilage; some were dried up, some were gooey and amorphous. The good kernels tasted just like the almonds we buy in the grocery store.

The 34 disseminules were in various conditions, from fresh (with the dark skin still attached—harvested from a yard in Melbourne Beach this last October) to almost disintegrated (from my beach). In this small sample, there seemed to be no outward hint from the seeds' outsides as to the condition of the kernel inside. Oddly, fresh seeds yielded no better kernels than worn seeds.

Here are 2 of the almonds that yielded edible kernels—one fresh, one not. The kernel is the white part in the center of each of these seeds. As you can see, the condition of the kernel in each of these seeds is pretty much the same.



The Inside Story by Cathy Yow (continued)

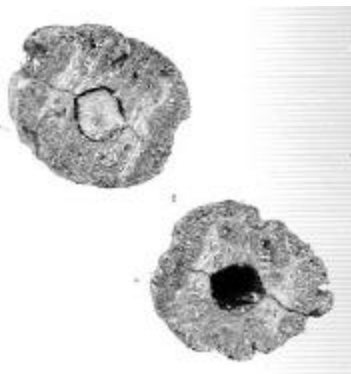
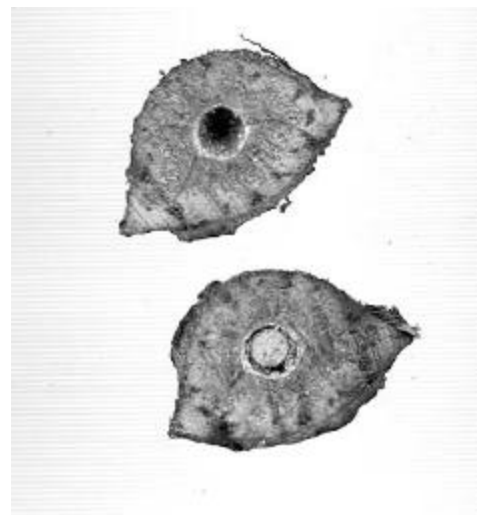
Here's my harvest from the 12 seeds that had edible kernels.

If you add kernels from a HUGE pile of the almonds—enough to get 2 cups of kernels, you can make a batch of Euell Gibbons' Beachcomber's Candy, as follows:

Boil 3 quarts of sweet coconut-palm toddy (made with fluid from the coconut palm flower sheath [substitute canned green coconut milk]) until reduced by at least three-fourths. Let it cool; then mix with 1 cup of thick coconut cream. Return the mixture to the fire, cook and stir until it reaches 235 degrees on a candy thermometer. Let cool, then beat for a few minutes until the candy loses its bright gloss. Stir in 2 TB of boiling water and 2 cups of almond kernels. Drop by spoonful on wax paper and allow to cool and harden.

Good collecting and bon appetite!

If you would like to read more about dining on Tropical Almonds, pick up a copy of "Euell Gibbons' Beachcomber's Handbook," David McKay Company, Inc., New York, 1967. Also included are recipes for candlenut relish and many recipes using coconut palm parts.



NEWS AND NOTES

The beaners will have a table and display set up at the **Space Coast Shell Festival**, open to the public January 19-20, 2002. Admission is free and hours are 9am-5pm. For more information contact Bobbi Cordy at cordy@yourlink.net, or call her at (321) 452-5736.



Laura Horan, pictured left with her dog **SpikeLeon**, has built a “tuna tower” out of debris found on her beach so Spike could ride along in her kayak. Laura joined us at this year’s symposium sharing stories of all the neat things she has been finding on her beaches among the hordes of sea-beans.

We would like to thank **Cathy Pingree** for donating her collection of driftseeds to The Drifters. They were collected over 22 years between Juno Beach, and Sebastian Inlet, Florida. A gorgeous display was made with the beans and posted several weeks ahead of the symposium in the Cocoa Beach Library. The collection drew many comments and generated much interest by passerby.

During this year’s symposium, **Cathy Yow** of Jamaica Beach, Texas, found an almost perfect specimen of the fossil crabs that have been featured in past issues. It was found at her first stop during Saturday morning’s **Bean-A-Thon** event, and “made her whole trip worthwhile!” Beaming with Ed Perry, he knew she had found something good when he could see her jumping up and down frantically from several hundred yards away. Later that night, Cathy left her prize at a local restaurant, where it was thrown away in a dumpster full of yucky things! She went back and divulged in some heavy “dumpster diving” to reclaim her treasure!



Pictured to the left are **Curt Ebbesmeyer** and Cathy Yow, grading some of the “junk” that was brought in during Saturday’s Bean-A-Thon event. Cathy’s near perfect specimen of a fossil crab is shown to the right. After being thrown out at the restaurant it was not so nice looking as it is here— it was covered with ketchup!



From **Sue Bradley**: *The Nature of Florida* series and *The Little Book of Sea-Beans and other Beach Treasures* by Cathie Katz are available through Atlantic Press, PO Box 510366, Melbourne Beach, Florida, 32951-0366, USA. For bulk orders (over 10 copies), contact Great Outdoors Publishing Company at 1-800-869-6609, or e-mail info@floridabooks.com.

To order *Nature a Day at a Time: An Uncommon Look at Common Wildlife* visit your favorite bookstore or any online bookstore (such as www.amazon.com) or order directly from Random House: 1-800-726-0600. (refer to ISBN 1578050502)

NEWS AND NOTES (continued)

Of the many notable things observed at this year's symposium, none caused as much controversy among "experts" as **Michele Kelley's** bright **yellow nickarbean** that was bleached white on the other side! A rare find on its own, yellow nickarbeans that float to beaches are only seen by a few of us that collect driftseeds. Here was one that was canary yellow on one side, with the beautiful concentric fracture lines characteristic also of gray and chocolate brown nickars, but completely bleached white on the other side. The shape of this seed also matched that illustrated as (H), *C. major*, on page 129 of the *World Guide*. Could we have two species of yellow nickarbeans, one that floats, and one that does not? (I have several yellow, sphere shaped nickers that don't float at all in seawater.) And what about the totally bleached out specimens we sometimes find on beaches? Are they just gray nickars, or possibly yellows too? Do you think the yellow coloration was picked up from a mineral or sand substrate the seed rested on? What do you readers think?



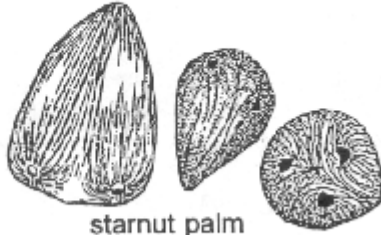
Here's Michele Kelley pictured with her controversial yellow nickarbean. Oddly enough, she found it just before the symposium, on a Brevard County, Florida beach. The colored side was a brilliant, canary yellow! The hilum end of the seed was colored light brown.



Simple Guide to Common Drift Seeds
 (Illustrations by Cathie Katz and Pamela J. Paradine)



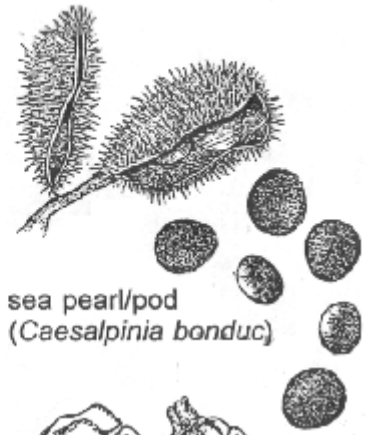
hamburger bean
 (*Mucuna* spp.)



starnut palm
 (*Astrocaryum* spp.)



country almond
 (*Terminalia catappa*)



sea pearl/pod
 (*Caesalpinia bonduc*)



bay bean/pod
 (*Canavalia rosea*)



sea heart
 (*Entada gigas*)



golfball/pod
 (*Manicaria saccifera*)



hand grenade
 (*Sacoglottis amazonica*)



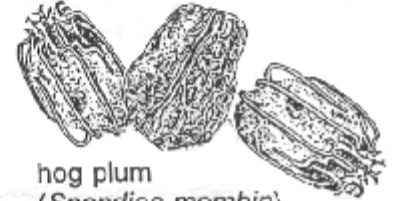
Mary's bean
 (*Merremia discoidesperma*)



coin plant
 (*Dalbergia* spp.)



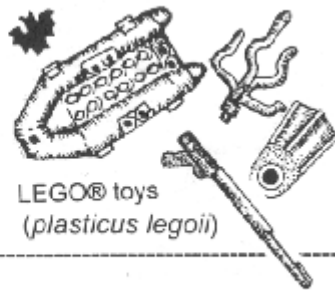
sea purse
 (*Dioclea reflexa*)



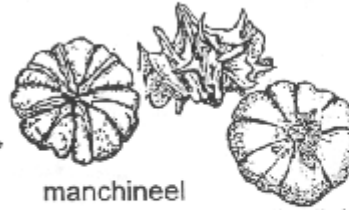
hog plum
 (*Spondias mombin*)



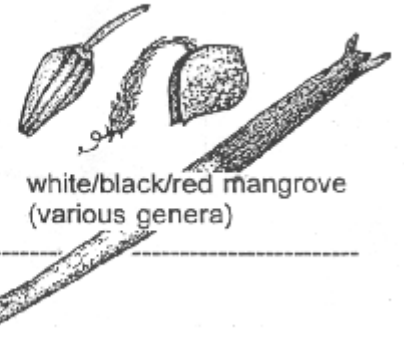
porcupine seed
 (*Caryocar microcarpum*)



LEGO® toys
 (*plasticus legoii*)



manchineel
 (*Hippomane mancinella*)



white/black/red mangrove
 (various genera)



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