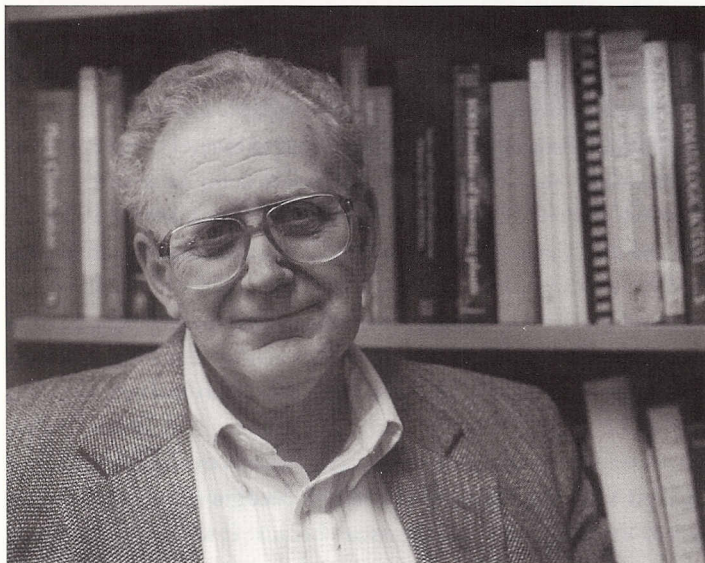


Fairbanks. In June 2000, Dan will fly to Alaska to attend her wedding.

Since his official retirement, Dan has remained a resident of Gainesville. He still resides in close proximity to the University of Florida with Zair, his best friend and closest companion, an African Basenji, who accompanies Dan on most of his plant hunting expeditions.



**Dick Wunderlin**

## **Dick Wunderlin**

Professor of Biology at the University of South Florida (USF), Director of the USF Institute for Systematic Botany, and Director of the USF Herbarium.

**Interview by Annie Schmidt, Hernando Chapter**

**D**r. Wunderlin lives with his wife Trevetta in Lutz, Florida, in Hillsborough County. They have lived in the Tampa area for

26 years. He is a charter member of the Suncoast Chapter of FNPS, in Hillsborough County, a Director at Large on the FNPS board (where he has graciously brought reason and experience to the table), serves as Chairman of the FNPS Research Endowment Grants Committee, and is FNPS Publications Committee Co-chair with Gil Nelson. At the University of South Florida (USF), he is a Professor of Biology, Director of the Institute for Systematic Botany, and the Director of the USF Herbarium.

Originally from the Midwest, Dr. Wunderlin was born in 1939 in Guttenberg, Iowa. When he was two years old, his family moved to southwestern Wisconsin where he lived until he graduated with a B.S. in Biology with minors in Chemistry and Geography from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. He then went on to receive his M.S. in Biology at Western Illinois University, where his thesis work was a floristic study of one of the state parks in Illinois. After teaching high school biology for several years, he received his Ph.D. from St. Louis University in Missouri. His Ph.D. work was on the Mexican and Central American species of the genus *Bauhinia*. He also was a Research Associate at the famed Missouri Botanical Gardens. Along with his continuing research and numerous publications on *Bauhinia*, he has been researching and publishing papers on the systematics and evolutionary studies of the Neotropical CUCURBITACEAE. After completing his Ph.D., Dr. Wunderlin received a job offer from USF and came to Florida, a move which gave him the opportunity to do field work throughout the year.

Dr. Wunderlin was interested in plants at an early age. "Being around plants all my early life on a farm in Wisconsin, scrambling around and exploring the wilds, I was fascinated by them. We had a lot of woods in southwestern Wisconsin with some very unusual and rare species. But it probably was not until my sophomore year in college, when I was influenced by a teacher (Dr. Hugh H. Iltis, University of Wisconsin), that I became aware of how unique the area was. This, I learned, was the unglaciated area of Wisconsin with many unique relic species. So, I changed my major from chemistry to biology. It was basically one day's experience and one teacher that strongly influenced my life."

Dr. Wunderlin was one of the early members of FNPS. "I joined FNPS in 1981 because of a general interest in the Florida flora. FNPS existed as an organization within the Florida Conservation Foundation. When FNPS became an independent organization, I

was serving on the Board of Directors. The beginning days were quite tumultuous. When the organization first went independent, we did everything ourselves – our own bookkeeping, membership, etc. Communications were weak and finances were often chaotic. We had several false starts at administering our own affairs, some of them quite costly. We were deep in the red for several years.”

“Probably one of the best things for FNPS is that it still has some of the ‘old geezers’ like me around – people that have been members almost from day one, that will stand up and say to the younger people: ‘Before you run off and do this, let us tell you that we’ve already tried this before and it didn’t work.’ We do have to entertain new ideas, but, we also don’t want to repeat our mistakes of the past. We need to keep an eye on the future as well as a memory of the past.”

When asked what he felt was his most important contribution to FNPS, Dr. Wunderlin refers to his well-known flora.

“When I came to Florida and to USF from the Midwest in 1973, Bob Long and Olga Lakela had just published *A Flora of Tropical Florida* two years previously. To identify plants in the rest of the state, my academic colleagues and I had to rely on John K. Small’s 1933 *Manual of the Southeastern Flora* to teach our students. With mentoring by Bob Long, Bob Godfrey, and Don Correll, I decided that we needed a better, more current understanding of the flora of the entire state. Over the years, with the cooperation of my Florida colleagues, my acquaintances, my students, and my many contacts in the FNPS, I was able to produce the *Guide to the Vascular Plants of Central Florida*, *Guide to the Vascular Plants of Florida*, and the *Atlas of Florida Vascular Plants*, which collectively have provided a better understanding of the state’s flora. More important than just publishing new information, which is what university professors are supposed to do, it provided a stimulus to professional and non-professional botanists alike to rediscover the wealth of plant life in the state. Some of my colleagues were quick to point out the omissions, errors, and places where the keys didn’t work in my floras, which is what peers are supposed to do. But in writing these, I vividly recall the words of advice from one of my mentors, Bob Godfrey. When his students were preparing to write their graduate thesis, he would post a sign over their desk that read: ‘don’t get it right, get it done.’ My advice to my younger colleagues is the same. If you don’t make the information that you have learned available to others, either right or wrong,

it is of no use to anyone. FNPS and its members have provided much valuable information, often-needed encouragement, and sometimes financial support to me over the years. I have tried to reciprocate in kind.”

Dr. Wunderlin is optimistic for the future of FNPS. “The current and very active native plant movement started in the 1970s with the formation of native plant societies in several states as a result of the growing conservation movement. Florida was among the first. Interest in native plants has continued to grow and many state societies, including FNPS, now have a national recognition. I see this growth continuing nationwide, not as rapidly as during the past two decades, but becoming more sophisticated. FNPS has enjoyed rapid growth from its inception, but its growth is now starting to slow, which is indicative of a maturing organization and our increasingly busy and more diversified lifestyles. This is true of most organizations nationwide, and not a sign that we are doing something wrong. I believe that FNPS will continue to grow in numbers of individuals and chapters into the future. There are still large areas of Florida that are not represented by chapters. I think that overall, the chapters will be smaller but more numerous, and there will be a better representation of the Florida population. As the Florida population increases, there will be new talent, new ideas, and new concerns for loss of natural habitat and species. People will undoubtedly have more free time, be more mobile, and have more information resources at their disposal. I believe FNPS will become more influential in policy-making decisions in the state because it will have an increase in members that will be well connected to the decision makers, as is true of any mature conservation-oriented organization, such as the Sierra Club or Audubon Society. However, there will still be a very strong interest at the local level from those just wishing to learn more about plants.”

“The strength of FNPS today is its diverse membership. This has also been the source of some of its problems. For those that remember the early days, FNPS originated as a “maverick” group that broke off from its parent organization, the Florida Conservation Foundation. Although this break was quite stressful at the time, it was a historic decision that we have not regretted. The society’s diversity later caused further tension and periodically there was talk of chapters seceding from FNPS to form independent organizations. Some did, but later came back into the fold; others incorpo-

rated in anticipation of becoming independent. However, with the excellent leadership, the increased cooperation among the membership and the administration, and better communication with the membership that we have enjoyed in recent years, the wounds seem to have healed and we are moving ahead as a fairly cohesive group. The very diversity that caused tension in the early years is the strength of the organization today. We now have growers, retailers, educators, conservationists, students, politicians, and people from all walks of life pulling forward in unison toward a common goal. It is because of this diversity that we have members that have the expertise and the contacts necessary to make a difference.”

When asked about improvements in FNPS and challenges for the future, Dr. Wunderlin had many good things to say.

“Lack of communication was one of the major obstacles to a cohesive membership until recently. With sincere thanks to Gil Nelson for his work with the Sabal Minor, to Maria Minno for her devotion to the website, to Candy Weller for taking a firm hand on administrative matters, and to the Board of Directors for rising to the challenge, FNPS has greatly increased its communication among the members. We need to maintain this kind of service to the membership and to improve upon it. With advances in information transfer (e.g. e-mail, voice-mail, and the Internet), this will be easier to do in the future.”

Dr. Wunderlin notes that the Research Endowment Fund is now permitting FNPS to fund native plant research, and that the Endowment Fund needs to increase so that we can award more and larger grants.

Dr. Wunderlin co-chairs the FNPS Publications Committee with Gil Nelson, and notes that FNPS has made significant changes in its publication policy. There are some new and exciting publications now being considered. Dr. Wunderlin believes that no matter how much we rely on electronic publication, there will remain a need for paper publications. We need to continue to increase the quality, number, and marketing of FNPS publications.

“The increase in quality scientific papers at the annual conference and our interaction with other conservation groups, such as Florida EPPC and the Society for Ecological Restoration, all indicate that FNPS is getting the word out and doing the right things. We need to continue this type of interaction and to network with other groups that have goals similar to ours.”

“The greatest challenge in the future will be to maintain diversity in FNPS and to keep the society moving forward to a common goal. If we become overly focused on just one thing, I believe the society will begin to decline.”

“As we embark on a new millenium, I foresee a bright future for FNPS. It is heartwarming to know that a number of people that joined FNPS in the early years are still members, and that we have many new members each year. There is still some uncertainty for the future, but certainly much less so than in the early years. I look back in satisfaction that FNPS has come a long way and is now maturing into a highly respected and increasingly influential organization. We need to keep up this momentum and always be receptive to new ideas and ways to improve the society. We cannot afford to rest on our laurels. There is still much work to do.”



EDITOR'S NOTE: We owe so much to the individuals presented in this issue, and to so many others whom we hope to see profiled in future issues of The Palmetto. Perhaps the greatest benefit of membership in FNPS is the opportunity to meet and know others who share our values and concerns. Maria Minno, our Communications Chair, said once that she feels that the members of FNPS are her “tribe.” Sara Stein, our inspiring 1999 conference keynote speaker (and new member), commented on how reassuring it is to be surrounded by people that understand and support your viewpoint. Surely many of us often feel alone in a world where, as Dan Austin points out, too many people think of plants as furniture, or mere decoration. Chapter meetings, field trips, and our annual conference give us the chance to surround ourselves with fellow members who act as our spiritual buoys.

To the interviewees, we thank you so much for your leadership, encouragement, inspiration, and moral support. We hope to follow in your footsteps and make you proud.

To the interviewers, I deeply regret not having the space to include the complete text of many of your interviews, which so clearly demonstrated your sincere appreciation of these wonderful people. And, there are more interviews waiting to be published, so if you don't see yours here, be patient and look forward, as I do, to future enrichment from our members.

## Member Profiles Wanted for Future Issues of

### The Palmetto

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