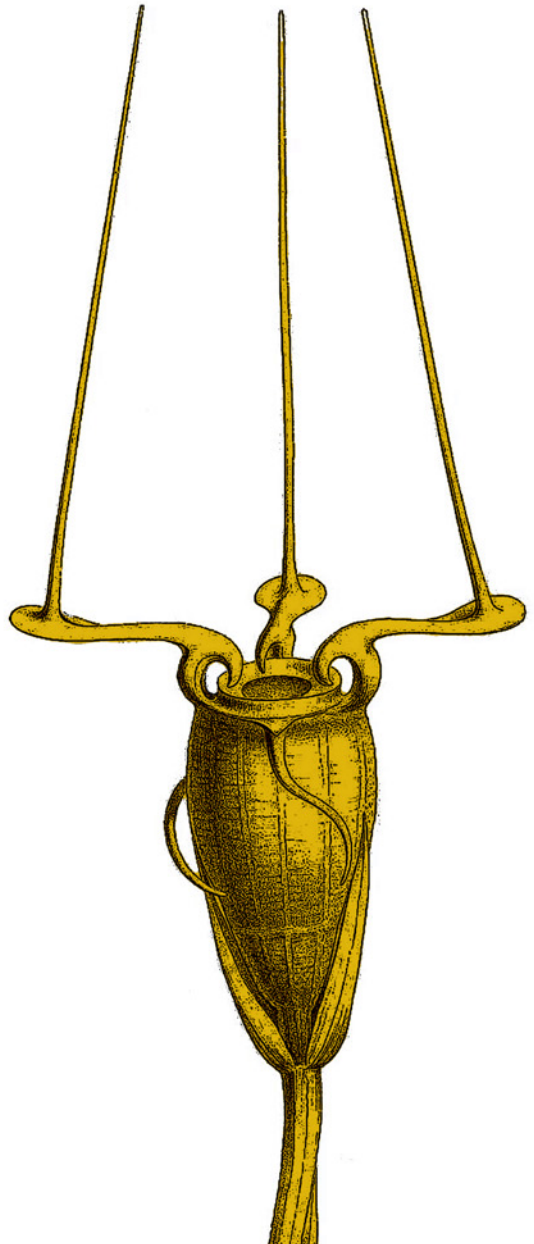


# Editorial





The recent identification in Japan of a new genus and species of fairy lanterns highlights the mystery and diversity of botanical life. Known for their urn-shaped flowers, fairy lanterns are non-chlorophyllous plants that feed on fungal mycelia. Many remain buried in soil most of their lives, only to rise above-ground fleetingly with blossoms resembling glasswork (Figure 1). Fairy lanterns are especially elusive and localised. Of the hundred recorded species, 55 are limited to the sites where they were first located and, remarkably, 38 species are based on *individual plants*. The Japanese name of the new species, *mujina-no-shokudai*, evokes a burrowing badger, an allusion to the plant's underground existence. The ecological specificity of fairy lanterns renders them exceedingly vulnerable (Suetsugu et al. 2024).

Kew's latest *State of the World's Plants and Fungi* counts 350,386 species of vascular plants and 2,500,000 species of fungi globally. Many new additions to the world's flora come not from remote locations but from herbaria, botanical gardens, and research centres. The report also refers to research 'darkspots' where less is understood, from a scientific standpoint, about floristic diversity. Despite room for optimism, 45 per cent of all flowering plants face extinction. In response, the report concludes that 'an enthused and motivated populace is needed to provide a new generation of planetary stewards' (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 2023, 88).

This is where plant studies is poised to contribute. As an inter-/transdisciplinary intervention, plant studies aims to cast light on biases towards botanical nature as an insentient, immobile backdrop. As this inaugural issue of *Plant Perspectives* illustrates, the field of plant studies reflects the vegetal turn in the arts, humanities and social sciences. At the same time, plant studies draws from well-established areas such as ethnobotany. Of note, as well, is research on flora in art, cultural studies, design, geography, history, literature, performance, philosophy, and sociology. Cross-cutting these domains, plant studies innovates textual,



FIGURE 1.

Marianne North's painting of *Thismia neptunis* (1869), a relative of the new species recently identified in Japan.

Source: Wikimedia Commons (Public Domain)

historical, archival, digital, ethnographic, multispecies, and collaborative approaches to investigating plant cultures – or *phytocultures*.

This first issue of *Plant Perspectives* highlights in particular the importance of archival, ethnographic and textual methods within plant studies. Alongside seven scholarly articles, a small but mighty suite of narrative non-fiction, short fiction and poetry illuminates the potential of creative, imaginative and non-academic perspectives. The issue features a cosmopolitan group of vegetal subjects from Australia, India, Mexico and the United Kingdom – breadfruit, bulkuru sedge, Montezuma cypress and yam daisy among them. Contributors emphasise Indigenous people’s relationships to plants while critiquing colonial and neocolonial impacts on human-flora relations.

The issue opens with Russell Fielding’s thought-provoking ‘Voltaire’s Breadfruit’. Fielding develops a well-structured historical analysis of global plant mobilities, or what he calls ‘colonial botanical transfer’. In the late-eighteenth century, the British Government introduced breadfruit trees (*Artocarpus altilis*) to the Caribbean from the Pacific. Through a close reading of philosophical and literary materials, Fielding argues for the broader recognition of French thinker Voltaire’s contribution to the radical idea of transplanting breadfruit to a distant region of the world.

An ethnographic approach informs Max D. López Toledano’s narratively crafted ‘Ahuehuete, Water Elder’. A major tourist attraction and source of revenue for locals, the 1,500–2,000-year-old Árbol del Tule or Tule Tree (a Montezuma cypress, *Taxodium mucronatum*) is known for its exceptional trunk circumference. Drought in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, however, has forced the town of Santa María del Tule to choose between providing water to the tree or human residents. Calling attention to ideas of venerability, heritage, temporality, and memory in long-lived trees, the article also foregrounds arboreal vulnerabilities in an era of climate disruption.

Invoking the idea of *plantiness* as the constellation of qualities that makes a plant *a plant*, Subarna De examines the shifting dynamics between people and flora in the Kodagu district of Karnataka, India. Sarita Mandanna’s *Tiger Hills* and Kavery Nambisan’s *The Scent of Pepper* present bioregional perspectives on the imperiled native plants of Kodagu, the largest producer of coffee and pepper in India. Closely linked to a species known as *rajakirita*, the ritual of Kailpodh inspires the Kodava community to reinhabit their land and recuperate human-flora traditions.

Similarly attentive to Indigenous people's botanical wisdom, Rod Giblett's article investigates the concept and practice of paludiculture, the cultivation of wetland plants, among Aboriginal Australians. Giblett's analysis elucidates the value of a species-level approach to plant studies drawing from historical and contemporary wetland narratives. Front and centre in the article are yam daisy (*Microseris* spp.) and the bulkuru sedge (*Eleocharis dulcis*), two wetland species cultivated by Aboriginal people through regenerative paludicultural principles and practices.

From paludiculture to companion planting, plant studies offers a framework for conceptual innovation. Based on the horticultural idea of companion planting – the purposive siting of different species close to one other – Astrid Møller-Olsen develops *companion reading* as a phytocritical approach. Cross-cultivating Chinese, Danish and English texts, the article elicits the manifold possibilities of translation as unruly, multispecies and multilingual. Møller-Olsen addresses a recurring question in plant studies: what does translation between human and plant languages entail?

A literary emphasis continues with Irene Bordignon's contribution on the botanical elements of Norwegian writer Siri Pettersen's fantasy epic *Odin's Child*. Bordignon's article connects to studies of plants in literature for children and young adults, or LCYA (Duckworth, and Guanio-Uluru 2022). This burgeoning area of plant studies stresses the pedagogical value of LCYA in fostering empathy for flora among young readers and countering 'plant awareness disparity' (Parsley, Daigle and Sabel, 2022).

Clare Hickman and Sarah L. Bell's 'Unlocking Landscapes through Westonbirt's Archive' exemplifies the value of archival methods in plant studies. Focusing on forester diaries and other materials held at Westonbirt, the National Arboretum, UK, Hickman and Bell apply a sensory framework to understanding designed landscapes and human-plant entwinements. As the article makes clear, physical and digital archives will continue to transform plant studies as the field evolves (Driver, Cornish and Nesbitt, 2022).

Our creative submissions include narrative fiction on kelp by Melody Jue and colleagues, and on the forests of India by Nina Bhatt, and poems on the cultural complexities of flora by Esthela Calderón, Anne Elvey, Noelle King, Peter Larkin and Glen Phillips. The issue concludes with two book reviews.

I am excited to announce our Call for Creative Submissions Editor. The role will involve managing diverse creative submissions—poetry, narrative non-fiction, fiction, visual art, sound art, and reflections on creative practice. Applicants should feel comfortable with multiple creative genres. To apply, please send a one-page letter of interest and short CV by 1 May 2024 to John Ryan and Isis Brook.

With the release of this inaugural issue, I invite you and your colleagues to consider *Plant Perspectives* as an outlet for your work. We accept submissions throughout the year on a rolling basis. Accepted work will be published Online First and then allocated to an issue when one becomes available. Online First articles represent the fully citeable version of record. We also invite proposals for Special Issues. *Plant Perspectives* is a Subscribe to Open (S2O) journal. Please encourage your libraries to support this new and ambitious endeavour.

Sincere thanks to Deputy Editor Dr Isis Brook, Reviews Editors Dr Benjamin Cooke and Dr Subarna De, Associate Editors, and Editorial Board Members for managing submissions and ensuring all work underwent peer-review. This issue would not have been possible without our external reviewers whose expertise has ensured the highest quality content.

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