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2004 AAAS International Scientific Cooperation Award Goes to Michael J. Balick of The New York Botanical Garden

17 FEBRUARY—AAAS, the world’s largest general scientific society, today named Michael Jeffrey Balick of The New York Botanical Garden to receive the 2004 International Scientific Cooperation Award.

Balick, Philecology Curator and Director of the Garden’s Institute of Economic Botany and Vice President for Research and Training, was honored by AAAS for his tireless efforts to promote scientific collaboration within the field of ethnobotany—the study of the relationship between plants and people across cultures. In particular, Balick was cited for his research emphasis “on preserving traditional knowledge and respect for the values of local peoples, and his support for the development of scientific institutions in areas of the world where they are needed most.”

“Over the past 30 years,” AAAS Chief International Officer Sherburne Abbott said, “Dr. Balick has developed a shared vision of research with his collaborators in many different parts of the world, working with them to gather essential financial and intellectual resources. He has been a leader in revitalizing the little-known field of ethnobotany.”

Balick comments, “I am honored to accept this award on behalf of my colleagues—the dedicated scientists, students, and indigenous people with whom I have worked in many places around the world. I have been privileged to collaborate with, educate, and, most importantly, learn so much from them. Our model in this scientific research is one of full partnership, ensuring local interest and benefits that will last far beyond the lifetime of the immediate project.”

Balick’s research, which has helped to transform ethnobotany into an internationally recognized academic discipline, has taken him to some of the most remote and biologically diverse sites on the planet, Abbott noted. Beginning in Costa Rica, for example, Balick played a key role in building a major botanical garden, then worked on the domestication of native plants in the Amazon Valley and Northeastern Brazil. In Belize, he and his collaborators established critical links between ethnobotany, conservation, local education and economic development. His investigations also have taken him to China, Thailand and India, as well as the Caribbean, where he developed a new program to fund research projects in ethnobotany and economic botany with support from the Rockefeller Foundation.

Currently, Balick is working in the Federated States of Micronesia in the Pacific, with a coalition of groups that include The New York Botanical Garden, The National Tropical Botanical Garden, The College of Micronesia, The Continuum Center for Health and Healing at Beth Israel Medical Center, The Nature Conservancy, the Pohnpei Council of Traditional Leaders, and Pohnpei State Government. The goal of Balick’s current work is to build a locally based scientific infrastructure that fosters the sustainable utilization of resources while also preserving traditional knowledge, in keeping with Micronesian values.

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Balick received his bachelor's degree in Agriculture and Plant Science from the University of Delaware and his master's degree and doctorate in Biology from Harvard University. He has worked at The New York Botanical Garden since 1980, and holds adjunct positions at Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Columbia University, through the Consortium for Environmental Research and Conservation, New York University Biology Department, and City University of New York. He is a co-founder of the Ix Chel Tropical Research Foundation in Belize, which promotes the importance of traditional knowledge, conservation and sustainable farming.

“Balick was a leader in opening the dialogue and debate on intellectual property rights, long before it was fashion,” said Abbott, who also directs the AAAS Center for Science, Innovation & Sustainable Development. “When he received one of the first collecting contracts from the National Cancer Institute to gather plant samples from Central and South America for screening against AIDS and cancer, he positioned his work with traditional healers in Belize, making them equal partners in the endeavor. He also worked to ensure that local people would benefit from any discoveries that were made from their plants.”

Balick, also a MetLife Fellow, a Fellow of the AAAS, and former President of the Society for Economic Botany, has helped to influence the training of many young people in the field of ethnobotany. He serves on the boards of many local and international conservation organizations.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) is the world's largest general scientific society, and publisher of the journal, *Science* (www.sciencemag.org). AAAS was founded in 1848, and serves some 262 affiliated societies and academies of science, serving 10 million individuals. *Science* has the largest paid circulation of any peer-reviewed general science journal in the world, with an estimated total readership of one million. The non-profit AAAS (www.aaas.org) is open to all and fulfills its mission to “advance science and serve society” through initiatives in science policy; international programs; science education; and more. For the latest research news, log onto EurekAlert!, www.eurekalert.org, the premier science-news Web site, a service of AAAS.

The New York Botanical Garden, a National Historic Landmark founded in 1891, is one of the world's great collections of plants, the region's leading educational center about gardening and horticulture, and an international center for plant research. The New York Botanical Garden is located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) at Fordham Road, and is easy to reach by car or by a 20-minute ride on the Metro-North Railroad from Grand Central Terminal. For more information on the Garden, see www.nybg.org.

For more information on AAAS awards, see <http://www.aaas.org/aboutaaas/awards/winners.shtml>. Awards will be bestowed at the 2005 AAAS Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., on 19 February.

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