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SELBY GARDENS BOTANIST NAMED SMITHSONIAN RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

*Prestigious Affiliation Provides Dr. John L. Clark with Access to
World-Class Collections, Facilitates Ongoing Research Projects*



SARASOTA, Fla., May 25, 2023 – Dr. John L. Clark, a research botanist at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, has been reappointed as a Research Associate in the Department of Botany at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History (NMNH).

Clark’s appointment lasts for three years, until May 2026. It continues an affiliation he has had with the Smithsonian since 2005.

“The renewal of John’s appointment as a Smithsonian Research Associate attests to the value of the science being conducted at Selby Gardens,” said Jennifer O. Rominiecki, president and CEO of Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. “Our botanists have discovered or first described for science more than 2,000 species, and their findings are critical to the understanding and conservation of plant biodiversity. This affiliation helps John share his work with researchers around the world, and it expands opportunities for Selby Gardens to contribute to vital scientific exploration.”

Specifically, the academic affiliation with the Smithsonian gives Clark personal access to the vast collections in the NMNH’s Department of Botany. The department’s herbarium, or collection of dried and preserved plants, currently holds 5 million specimens, making it one of the world’s 10 largest.

The Research Associate position also will facilitate Clark’s ongoing collaborative research with botanists around the country and the world. He is particularly excited about several projects he is working on with Dr. Larry Skog, research botanist emeritus at NMNH and Clark’s advisor when he pursued his PhD at George Washington University. Clark’s sponsor for the new three-year Smithsonian appointment is Paul Peterson, a current research botanist and curator of botany at NMNH.

“Institutionally, this appointment promotes sharing information,” said Clark, who praised the Smithsonian as a worthy institution for depositing important plant material collected in the field. “The Smithsonian does such a good job with digitizing, curating the specimens, and making the information widely available.” Clark, who has contributed more than 17,000 plant collections to major herbaria, typically dedicates his collections to at least three priority institutions—Selby Gardens, the Smithsonian, and an herbarium in the host country where the plant was collected. He noted that the NMNH’s plant collection is particularly strong in “type” specimens, the specimen designated as the reference point for a plant species when it is first named. “Whenever I describe something new to science, I try to make sure that a type is at Selby Gardens and a type is at the Smithsonian,” said Clark.

Clark has been affiliated with Selby Gardens through a research partnership since 2009. He joined the staff full-time in January 2023. Since then, he has conducted plant research expeditions to Dominican Republic and Ecuador.

Clark specializes in the plant family Gesneriaceae, flowering plants that are distributed throughout the world’s tropical forests. Gesneriads are an important part of Selby Gardens’ botanical research and a notable component of its living plant collection. About a third of gesneriads are epiphytic, meaning they grow on other plants without harming them. Selby Gardens is the only botanical garden in the world dedicated to the study and display of epiphytes.

Selby Gardens is also a Smithsonian Affiliate, one of more than 200 museums and cultural institutions around the country that have engaged in a long-term partnership with the Smithsonian to promote “the increase and diffusion of knowledge” by creating experiences that educate and inspire.

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Photos:

High-resolution images of John L. Clark may be downloaded here for publication:

https://bit.ly/MSBG_John-L-Clark_media-photos

About Marie Selby Botanical Gardens

Marie Selby Botanical Gardens provides 45 acres of bayfront sanctuaries connecting people with air plants of the world, native nature, and our regional history. Established by forward-thinking women of their time, Selby Gardens is composed of the 15-acre Downtown Sarasota campus and the 30-acre Historic Spanish Point campus in the Osprey area of Sarasota County, Florida. The Downtown Sarasota campus on Sarasota Bay is the only botanical garden in the world dedicated to the display and study of epiphytic orchids, bromeliads, gesneriads and ferns, and other tropical plants. There is a significant focus on botany, horticulture, education, historical preservation, and the environment. The Historic Spanish Point campus is located less than 10 miles south along Little Sarasota Bay. One of the largest preserves showcasing native Florida plants and active archaeology that is interpreted for and open to the public, it celebrates an archaeological record that encompasses approximately 5,000 years of Florida history. Marie Selby Botanical Gardens is a Smithsonian Affiliate and is also accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. For more information visit www.selby.org.