

# The Drifting Seed

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## THE DRIFTING SEED

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

Distributed to more than 20 countries.

**Ed Perry, Editor and Publisher**

**Dr. Charles (Bob) Gunn, Advisor**

**Patricia Frazier, Production Editor**

**John Beerensson, Columnist**

**Dr. Curtis Ebbesmeyer, Columnist**

**Patty Foreman, Columnist**

**Ed & Biddy Jarzembowski, Columnists**

**Margie Mitchell, Columnist**

**Dr. Gerald Sullivan, Columnist**

**Dr. John Williams, Columnist**

**Paul Mikkelsen, Web Site Manager for [www.seabean.com](http://www.seabean.com)**

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For Newsletter Subscription Information, Submissions, Donations,

For Seed Identification:

contact: **Ed Perry**, P.O. Box 510366

Melbourne Beach, FL 32951—USA

E-mail: [seabean@seabean.com](mailto:seabean@seabean.com) (**Paul Mikkelsen**)

or [Seaheart88@aol.com](mailto:Seaheart88@aol.com) (**Ed Perry**)

## Thirteenth Annual International Sea-Bean Symposium

October 17 - 18, 2008, Cocoa Beach, Florida

by Margie Mitchell, margiemitchell@cfl.rr.com

It's time to re-calibrate our beachcombing eyes! Instead of focusing on all those little black blobs in the wrack line, now we've learned to spot colorful bits of frosted glass in the shell hash. Yes, beachcombers, this year's symposium theme was sea GLASS, not sea BEANS. Our keynote speaker, Richard LaMotte, author of *Pure Sea Glass, Discovering Nature's Vanishing Gems*, gave us a whole new view of walking the beach. Maybe we won't completely give up on the magic of seabeans, but now that we've learned where and when to look for those rare and beautiful multi-colored jewels, beachcombing will never be quite the same.



The key to finding the best sea glass, as it turns out, is to find a location where a large river drains into the ocean, especially on the southern shoreline. Bays are good, but not so the open ocean. Unlike seabeans, glass does not travel on the ocean's currents. Most is fairly local to where it originally went into the water. But, as with seabeans, full moons and high tides are helpful to the search, as is wind, which may expose what's already there. As plastic has gradually conquered the world, sea glass has become more and more rare, but it is still possible for the lucky and smart

beachcomber to find some of these exquisite gifts of the sea. But don't take my word for it. Get a copy of Richard LaMotte's book and see for yourself.

Other speakers we enjoyed this year included perennial favorites Ed Perry, with his excellent primer, "Beginners' Beachwalking," and Dr. Curt Ebbesmeyer, with "What's Floating in our Oceans Now?"

Curt's talk led off with a twist toward the macabre, as he discussed his work in forensic oceanography, tracking dead bodies and body parts across the ocean in search of their origins. On a somewhat lighter note, Curt gave us some ideas about where to go in search of the best ocean-borne garbage around the North Atlantic gyre: Mexico (the Yucatan), Texas (Matagorda), and Florida (right here on the east coast). He also addressed the history of flotsam, noting that the Atlantic garbage patch dates back to at least the time of Christopher Columbus, who erroneously believed he must be nearing land when he encountered North American garbage off the Azores.



On Saturday, our most far-flung wandering drifter, Izumi Hanno, returned to the symposium after a five-year absence, to give a presentation about what she's been doing since we last saw her. In a nutshell, she's been living a beachcomber's dream, traveling the South Pacific in search of seeds and fruits, their origins and uses in their native environments. She and husband Jim Godfrey first re-located from Japan to Malaysia, and then began a voyage of discovery, mostly with all their possessions on one small motorcycle, to such exotic locales as Sumatra, Borneo, Brunei, the Philippines, and Thailand. Everywhere they went, they visited botanical gardens and beaches, seeking out local seed experts and traditional medicine practitioners. Their plan is to return to Borneo and establish a seed museum near Mount Kinabalu, their favorite spot in all their travels. They're off to a good start. They've already shipped 250 pounds of seeds to Japan from their travels!



Also on Saturday, Alice Lowe and Bill Blazek reprised their hugely popular talk on seabeans polishing. Using two completely different approaches – Bill using his hands, Alice with tumblers – these two experts produce amazing results. Everyone in the capacity crowd left inspired to try it themselves.

The Odd Bean Contest this year reflected the sea glass theme of the symposium. The most popular category was not a bean at all. “Rarest Sea Glass” brought in a small mountain of entries which overwhelmed the contest table. With so many entries, guest judge Richard LaMotte generously donated several copies of his book so that we could award honorable mention prizes. Those went to Joanne Powell for “Best Figural” (a small liquor bottle in the “spirit” of Marilyn Monroe), Betsy Fagan for “Prettiest in a Rare Color” (red warning light fragment), and Alan Rammer for the “Best of the West” (bullseye from a fishing float). The grand prize for the overall rarest entry went to George Bowman for a whole snout-nosed case gin bottle lip, which Mr. LaMotte dated at around 1780.



Other Odd Bean awards went to Joan Clark for the shiniest sea heart and to Alice Surrency for the largest Mary's bean.

Joanne Powell won the Bean-a-thon this year with twenty-seven species. Other Bean-a-thon winners were:

- Youth Award: Jonathan Galka (12), runner-up Grace Wiggins (9)
- Cool Bean: Elizabeth Eubanks (sugar apple fruit)
- Non-Bean: Sheri Ryson (sea pig)



The room was filled with interesting exhibits, some new, some old favorites. New faces included David McRee, author of *Florida Beaches – Finding Your Paradise on the Lower Gulf Coast*. If you want to know anything about Southwest Florida beaches, David is your man. He's also the beach and surfing expert for [visitflorida.com](http://visitflorida.com), the state's official source for travel planning. Visit his own web site at [www.beachhunter.net](http://www.beachhunter.net) and download a free e-book on how to stay safe from sharks, jellyfish, and other scary things.

Also joining us as a new exhibitor was Linda McBrearty with a collection of sea glass, along

with unusual shells and stones, including a whole tray of "Boo! shells," which, yes, absolutely did resemble little ghost faces.

Long-time attendees Elaine Norton and Carol Agnew were first-time exhibitors with sea glass, "cool bean" shirts and hats, and cool-fact seabeam giveaways for the kids (visit [www.WrackWear.com](http://www.WrackWear.com)).

Other exhibits included:

- Krieger Publishing's ocean, beach, and plant books;
- Cathie Katz' sand box and display boards;
- Nan Rhodes' exotic seed jewelry and tiki art.
- Dr. Blair and Dawn Witherington's fantastic book, *Florida's Living Beaches: A Guide for the Curious Beachcomber*, as well as cards and prints with Blair's photography and Dawn's clever art.
- Izumi Hanno and Jim Godfrey's display of Izumi's art and other materials designed to inspire us all to follow in their footsteps to the Pacific (Jim swears it's really cheap once you get there!).
- Jim Angy's beautiful wildlife photography, including some new daylight photos of hatchlings and nesting adult sea turtles.
- Alice Lowe's polishing expo, complete with three tumblers running continually and samples of her seabeam art. This exhibit always had a crowd!
- Curt Ebbesmeyer's usual, and unusual, collection of trash and treasures: a message in a bottle, Nan Rhodes' "nail man," a sea pig (complete with lipstick in honor of the election season), an emergency lifebuoy marker, doll parts, crustacean tags, light sticks, and a weather balloon.
- Still Nature's latest project: *Florida Beach Basics – The Space Coast*. The first in a series of pocket guides to Florida's beaches, each packet contains a DVD and a series of take-along references cards to help visitors find their way around the best of the Space Coast's beaches. Check

out the web site at [www.FloridaBeachBasics.com](http://www.FloridaBeachBasics.com) and be sure to take a look at Marge Bell's beach blog while you're there.

- Bill Blazek's ever-growing collection of hand polished seabean. This year he also brought along his collection of 1,000 or so beachcombed chapsticks (but I don't think he's figured out how to polish them yet!).

Thanks to everyone who donated the wonderful collection of raffle prizes to help support publication of *The Drifting Seed* for another year. We couldn't keep afloat without your generosity and creativity. We sold a lot of tickets and all the winners were thrilled. Thanks also to everyone who helped with set-up and clean-up, worked the hospitality table, and pitched in with all the other minute-to-minute details of running a successful symposium. It's a group effort and we appreciate everyone's contribution.

Special thanks to Nan Rhodes, who designed this year's "speed beaning" t-shirt. Also special thanks to Marge Bell, who decided we hadn't been eating right and took it upon herself to feed all the workers and exhibitors. And extra special thanks to Ray Dickinson and all his staff at the Cocoa Beach Public Library,



who go out of their way every year to give us so much behind-the-scenes support and help. We really couldn't do it without them.



We've already set the date for next year – October 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> at the Cocoa Beach Public Library. Come and join us!



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## MIB

by Dr. Gerald Sullivan & John Williams  
[geraldsully@yahoo.com](mailto:geraldsully@yahoo.com) and [john.williams@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:john.williams@mail.utexas.edu)

As we piled out of John's shiny, black, hail-poxed Ford pickup, he exclaimed he would really like to find a message in a bottle. My response was simply, "I'd like to find another *Mucuna fawcettii*." Thirty minutes later, I had found his MIB and shortly thereafter he found my thick-banded

*Mucuna*.

From conversations with both true drifters and other beach walkers, it

has become apparent that most desire an adventurous or romantic message in a bottle. Not us! Give us a hard core scientific plea for assistance and it will sail us into heavenly bliss. Such was the case on this September morning following the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. The MIB was discovered at the base of a horribly



eroded dune on Mustang Island, Texas, well past marker 101. The entire front of the dune had been washed away as far as the eye could see. See photo.

The item was partially covered with sand and lying at the foot of the sheared face of the dune. A gentle nudge with my walking stick revealed a glass vial very reminiscent of a science laboratory scintillation bottle. Closer examination revealed that it was indeed a MIB. This sort of container did not surprise me since my last MIB was in a new 4-ounce prescription bottle. The glass portion of the MIB was in pristine condition, whereas the plastic screw cap was showing degradation in the form of nicks and gouges on the lower edge and also hundreds of pits and short grooves on the cap's top surface.

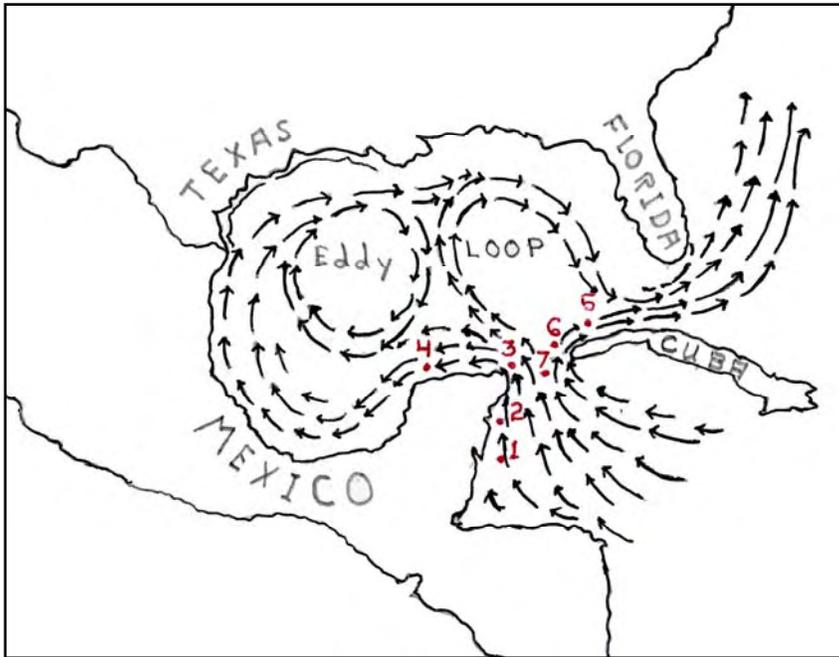


Enclosed in the vial were instructions typed in English and Spanish on waterproof paper, including a toll-free telephone number and email to report the date, location and a code identifying the vial's place of release. A reward was also offered based on a random drawing from the returns. In addition the vial also contained 16 grams of sand ballast to ensure that the top of the vial was at the water surface which was an attempt to simulate the organism they were tracking. The researcher whom we communicated with was adamant that "the sand was bought from Home Depot, so it's probably not Keys sand – it is silica based rather than coralline." Must be a law or two concerned with the removal of sand, you think? Editor Ed?

Just our luck we were a smidgen late for the reward lottery, something like four years late. Apparently this portion of the research project was officially launched in late June, 2004, and officially over some four months later in Oct., 2004. Our MIB was found on 9-19-08 which computes to

approximately 4 years and 2½ months from release to recovery. This portion of the scientific project (1) involved the release of 4,000 scintillation vials at seven predetermined sites. Refer to map.

Pragmatic John speculated that our MIB arrived within 3 months of release, became stranded on Mustang Island and was



immediately incorporated into our dune system, where it remained for over 4 years in a protected environment and would not have surfaced without the destructiveness of hurricane Ike in 2008. A more romantic and appealing speculation would be that the highly chemical and micro-organism resistant bottle was captured by the renowned Gulf-Atlantic-Caribbean cycle and remained there for years until it was cast ashore by Ike. Perchance, Dr. Curtis Ebbesmeyer could calculate the number of completed cycles our MIB would have taken.

Let us fantasize for a moment and think of these 4,000 vials as seabans. Tracking these as drift

seeds might give us a greater insight into the journey taken by our coveted drift seeds. The following results were presented by Delgado et al. in 2006 (1).

### Results and Comments:

Release Point #1 = 30 (3%) of 1,000/ all recovered on Yucatan shores.

Comment = Now we can understand the unbelievable collection of 3,230 drift seeds (2) accomplished by the “Band of 11” at Mayan Beach Garden in 2005 which is located smack-dab-in-the-middle of Banco Chinchorro (release point #1).

Release Point #2 = 49 (9.8%) of 500/ 48 recovered in Yucatan/ 1 recovered in Galveston, TX.

Comment = It is probably safe to assume that seabean harvesting on all Yucatan beaches north of this release site would be totally incomprehensible. One would probably require gunny sacks or apple boxes. The escape of only one maverick bean is inexplicable, but its final destination understandable.

Release Point #3 = 13 (2.6%) of 500/ all recovered on south Padre Island, TX, within 3-4 months.

Release Point #4 = 12 (2.4%) of 500/ 10 recovered on south Padre/ one recovered in Palm Beach, FL six months after release/ one recovered on Mustang Island, TX, 4 years and 2 ½ months after release.

Comment = The recovery of a combined 2.5% from these two release sites shores up the past performance and anticipated performances of Padre Island as a beaning haven.

Release Point 5 = 131 (26%) of 500/ all recovered from Miami Beach to Jupiter, FL.

Release Points 6 & 7 = 19 (1.9%) of 1000/ one was discovered in the Florida Keys—all others recovered from north Florida to North Carolina.

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Comment = As expected these drift vials followed established waterways. Of the 1500 vials released in the Florida Straits, 10% were recovered. All, but one, bypassed the Keys and were recovered from Miami Beach to points north. This might well explain why year after year the Florida beaches are fabulously fantastic and I'm not referring to the encroaching "nekkid" part of the beaches, but to sea beaning.

The final distribution of all the recovered drift vials from the seven release sites is explicable by applying present day concepts of water flow into and out of the Gulf of Mexico. Refer to map.

The Loop Current is a warm variable current in the Gulf created by the intrusion of the Yucatan Current which flows northward between Cuba and the Yucatan Peninsula. It moves north into the Gulf creating warm water spin-off eddies which gyrate south and west which are capable of transporting debris, i.e. seabean, to far away Texas shores, finally exiting to the east through the Florida Straits with a mighty swoosh! At this point it is recognizable as the Gulf Stream.

One might note the following:

- a. Surprisingly, only one drift vial from a total of 2,500 released from sites 1, 2, 3 & 4 was recovered on a Florida shore.
- b. It is also interesting to note that the recoveries from 5 out of the 7 release sites (#1, 3, 4, 6 & 7) lend credence to the "2% Rule."
- c. A total of 255 (6.4%) drift vials were recovered, which leaves a grand total of 3,745 vials unaccounted for. Where in the devil are they?

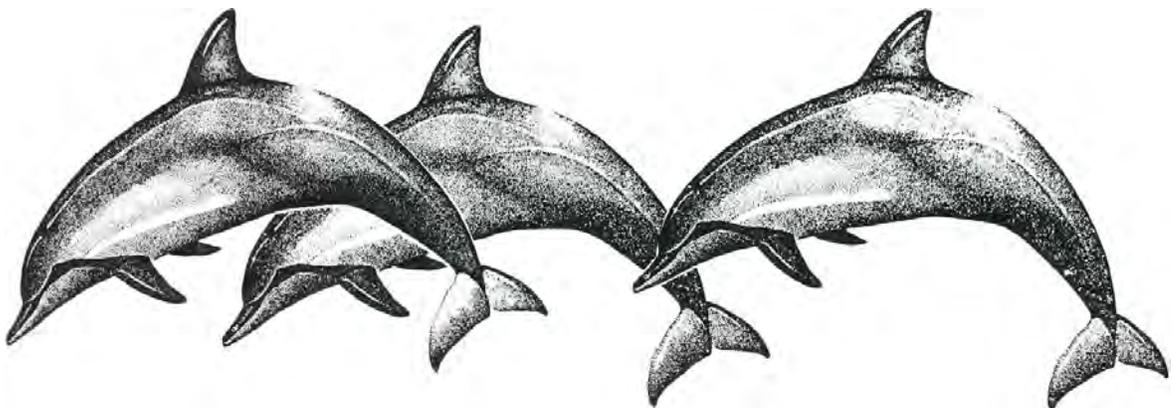
Only the Shadow knows!

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1. Delgado, G.A., R.A. Glazer, D. Hawtol, D.A. Aranda, L.A. Rodriguez-Giland, A. de Jesus-Navarette. 2006. Do Queen Conch (*Strombus gigas*) Larvae Recruiting to the Florida Keys Originate from Upstream Sources? Evidence from Plankton and Drifter Studies. Proceeding of a Special Symposium, 59<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute. Belize City, Belize
2. Ebbesmeyer, C.C. 2006. Sea-Beans in Hog Heaven. *The Drifting Seed* 12 (1).

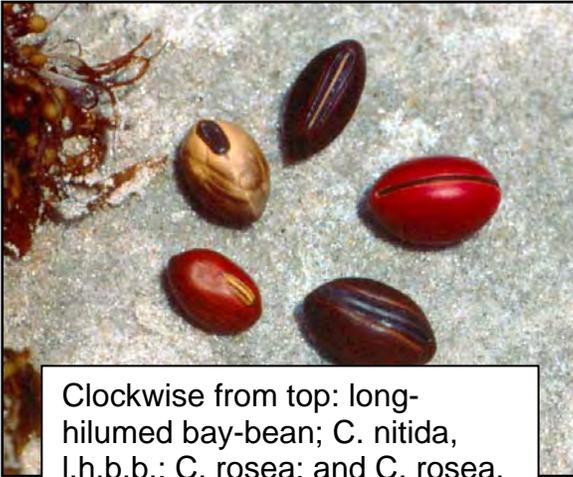
*The celebration of one's birthday is totally incongruent. On this day bestow upon the Mother lavish praise and gifts. But for her, you are not.*

Navillus



## The Giant Bay-Bean

by John Beerensson, [beerensson@bellsouth.net](mailto:beerensson@bellsouth.net)  
Merritt Island, Florida



Clockwise from top: long-hilumed bay-bean; *C. nitida*, l.h.b.b.; *C. rosea*; and *C. rosea*.

Yes, there is a giant bay-bean (*Canavalia sp. or spp?*). And yes, size once again does matter. On the bay-bean pages in Perry & Dennis' book, *Sea-beans from the Tropics*, there is mention (pgs. 74-79) of bay-beans with extra long hilums. Better yet, there are pictures of two of these gems (plates 9.5 & 9.7). Ed Perry takes darn good pictures!! Let me digress for a moment. Ed has taken all the pictures that have accompanied my articles past and present. He knows my skills with my Kodak Brownie camera are not yet fully developed. A big *Thank You* Ed!!

In Gunn & Dennis' *World Guide* (1976 edition), the extra long hilum bay-bean is also discussed (pgs. 130 & 131). Did you notice I mentioned the 1976 edition of the *World*

*Guide*? Yes, I do have a first edition of our beaning bible. Impressed?? I got it from my sister-in-law Kay Sutherland who lives in Kansas. She knew of my interest in sea-beans. She got the book from the Wichita library network. Seems that once in awhile they get rid of books that are not checked out enough in order to open up more shelf space. My book is pristine. New condition. Seems it was never checked out in its 31 years on the shelf. Whoa! . . . does that mean there are no sea-beaners living in Kansas??

But I digress again. These bay-bean giants are very rare on Florida's beaches. I've found only two in all my years of beaning.

*Giant* is a relative term. My longest is 26 mm. True, it is not in the same league as the rumored four foot sea purse Fay Wray found on Skull Island back in the 1930's, but it is still the giant in the family of bay-beans. But maybe mine is not the biggest. Maybe one of you beaners out there has one that's bigger than mine. Maybe not. As always, big is defined as length.

Soooooooooooo . . . Ed Perry, Barbara Rolph, Michele Kelley, Nan Rhodes, Margie Mitchell, Bill Blazek, Christopher Boykin, Alice Lowe, Alice Surrency, Mary Bowman, Paul Mikkelsen, Deb Trachtman, Pat Frazier, Blair and Dawn Witherington, Jim Angy, Marge Bell, Matt MacQueen, Ray Dickinson, Mary Canada, Cecelia Abbott, Elaine Norton, Steve and Stephanie Bernstein, Mike Stewart and all you other Florida beaners; Mike and Sam Burnett, Jerry and Carol Sullivan, John Williams, and all you other Texas beaners; Curt Ebbesmeyer and Alan Rammer in Washington; Bob Gunn in North Carolina; Wayne Armstrong in California; Bill and Nancy Eastlake in Missouri; Dennis Doucette in Michigan; Sue Bradley in Tennessee; Cathy Yow in Illinois; Jeremy Smith in Australia; Izumi Hanno and Jim Godfrey somewhere in Southeast Asia, Charles Nelson in the UK; Gerhard Cadée and Wim Kruiswijk in the Netherlands; Liliane Hosten-Willems in South Africa; Murry Gregory in New Zealand: and all you other beaners, wherever you live . . . do you have one of these, and if you do, how big is yours??

While I'm at it . . . let me know if you have a Cathie's bean (same family) bigger than 26 mm.

Also while I'm at it . . . are there any beaners out there from Kansas??

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## Hearts Gone Wild

by John Beerensson, [beerensson@bellsouth.net](mailto:beerensson@bellsouth.net)  
Merritt Island, FL 32952

Yes, I'm talking about the sea heart (*Entada gigas*). I'm not talking about medical issues like irregular heart beats or atrial fibrillation. Nor am I talking about love and lust issues like extreme passion or drooling. Speaking of love, we often think of the sea heart as being heart shaped. Why?! . . . I don't know. Most sea hearts are not heart shaped. But who cares. We all love our hearts no matter what they look like. See Ed Perry's and John Dennis' *Sea-Beans from the Tropics* for folklore and details about this beloved bean.



Let's talk wild. How wild does a sea heart get? My favorite heart looks like a fossilized horse's hoof core. Yes, I'm into paleontology. Maybe you're into biology, and you have a heart that looks like a dissected frog. Or maybe you're into astronomy as well as being a fan of Flash Gordon, and your heart looks like the planet Mongo.



While we are digressing, maybe you're into dentistry and love hearts covered with bite or beak marks. They're wild too.

Back to my hoof core. What does a fossilized horse's hoof core look like, you ask? A picture is provided, along with a picture of my wild heart. Can you can see the family resemblance?

Many of you beaners out there must have a sea heart equally as wild, or maybe more wild. For those of you living across the Pacific, *Entada phaseoloides* can also be considered.

You know where I'm going with this, don't you? Ed Perry, Barbara Rolph, Michele Kelley, Nan Rhodes, Margie Mitchell, Bill Blazek, Christopher Boykin, Alice Lowe, Alice Surrency, Mary Bowman, Paul Mikkelsen, Deb Trachtman, Pat Frazier, Blair and Dawn Witherington, Jim Angy, Marge Bell, Matt MacQueen, Ray Dickinson, Mary Canada, Gina Reed, Mark Bartlett, Billie Wagner, Cecelia Abbott, Elaine Norton, Steve and Stephanie Bernstein, and all you other Florida beaners; Mike and Sam Burnett, Jerry and Carol Sullivan, John Williams, and all you other Texas beaners; Curt Ebbesmeyer and Alan Rammer in Washington; Bob Gunn in North Carolina; Wayne Armstrong in California; Bill and Nancy Eastlake in Missouri; Dennis Doucette in Michigan; Sue Bradley in Tennessee; Cathy Yow in Illinois; Jeremy Smith in Australia; Izumi Hanno and Jim Godfrey somewhere in Southeast Asia; Charles Nelson in the UK; Gerhard Cadée and Wim Kruiswijk in the Netherlands; Liliane Hosten-Willems in South Africa; Murry Gregory in New Zealand; and all you other beaners, wherever you live . . . just how wild is your heart??

Send Ed or me a picture. Maybe at the next Symposium we'll display your pictures. Maybe not. No matter. Fame is fleeting.

Another option is to make a video of all the hearts gone wild. We could call it . . . duh! . . . *Hearts Gone Wild*. Do you think it could compete with the nationally advertised video called *Girls Gone Wild*?? Whoa!!! . . . I'm already thinking big bucks here.

## Sea Beaning in the Bahamas

by Patty Foreman, ibis037@yahoo.com

The year 2008 found the crew of the S/V *Ibis*, Patty, Ted and daughter Jennifer, taking off from La Belle, Florida for the Bahamas on February 10th. Jennifer had just returned from a 2-month stint rescuing turtles on the west coast of Mexico, near Tenexpa. While there on the beach collecting turtle eggs, Jennifer also collected 99 hamburger beans, *Mucuna holtonii* (Kuntze) Moldenke, which she presented to Patty. Patty was so thrilled with this addition to her sea-bean collection that she immediately started polishing and making bracelets. Patty exclaimed, "These beans will keep me busy all the way to the Bahamas!"



*Ibis* made her way slowly, gunk-holing down the west coast of Florida and through the Florida Keys across the Gulf Stream, island hopped through the northern Bahamas and arrived in Nassau, Bahamas one month later. After a short stay there Jennifer jumped ship for NY, NY; the *Ibis* with Ted and Patty aboard made its way slowly down through the Exuma, Bahamas chain of Islands.

While walking on the windward beach at Norman's Cay, Patty found 4 sea hearts, 1 hamburger and 1 unidentified bean. *Ibis* was anchored at Norman's for a week awaiting on favorable winds to proceed south. At this time of the year cold fronts

off the U.S. coast produce periods of strong and variable winds. *Ibis'* short-handed crew paid close attention to the weather. A few days later and several islands further south they arrived at the, somewhat-off-the-beaten path, Brigantine Cays. This was a first visit to these cays for the crew of the *Ibis*. Patty was excited, hoping to be the first person this season to walk these beaches. She had visions of treasure in the form of sea-beans on her mind.

Two seahearts, 2 red hamburgers and 1 calabash were added to the collection at the Brigantines. Arriving in George Town, Bahamas, their cruising headquarters for the winter, on March 22nd with 11 sea-beans added to the collection, not to mention a few fish, conch and lobster that were devoured with much gusto, Patty was thinking, "This is going to be a good year for sea-beans."

Searching for sea hearts is a big past time for members of the Caribbean cruising community, thanks in part to the availability of *The Little Book of Sea-Beans*. It is sold at the Exuma land and sea park. Talking up sea-beaning and sharing information with others is always fun. There are many cruising people who are still unaware of the joys of sea-beaning. Patty did her best to spread the word. While discussing sea-beans with friends, someone stated that a boat cruising the Ragged Islands had found 500 sea-beans. This was hard to believe considering *Ibis'* diligent crew found only 11 beans in the month past. With 500 sea-beans dancing in Patty's head the crew of the *Ibis* made plans to visit the Ragged Islands. The Raggeds are a fairly remote string of small, uninhabited cays, except for Ragged Island, in the southeast Bahamas. The cays run from Water Cay to Ragged Island in the south.

Ragged Island, only 50 miles from Cuba, is a settlement of about 50 souls and is supplied by a weekly mail boat from Nassau. All supplies, food and fuel are ordered in advance from Nassau; *Ibis* must carry all the necessary stores for vessel and crew for the anticipated month-long trip.

The crew set off with high hopes. An early morning start and a fair wind brought *Ibis* to Water Cay. From Water Cay *Ibis* made 20-to 30-mile hops from cay to cay spending a few days at each cay. The days were spent combing the windward beaches for those elusive sea-beans and any other interesting object that can be found. Cays that proved the most productive were Low Water Harbor, Buenavista, Johnson, Loggerhead, Maycock, Raccoon, and Double Breasted Cay. Approaching these cays on their windward side, which faces the Atlantic Ocean, was quite exciting in the 12-ft. dink with its 2-hp engine. The total sea-bean count for the Ragged Cays was an astounding 571. Patty was convinced that the unbelievable was believable. Also found on these windward beaches were many fishing floats—no glass balls, but plenty of interesting plastic and metal floats, untold numbers of flip flops and shoes and endless plastic scraps. The most remarkable plastic was margarine containers from Haiti scattered on every beach. They must have been from a lost ship, as there were too many to be from only one container. The big find of the year was a very faded Cathie's bean. Patty thought it was a plastic ball as she bent to pick it up. Was she ever surprised and delighted. You never know when you are going to find that rare bean.

Types and numbers of sea-beans found:

- 430 seahearts
- 73 hamburgers (56 red, 10 brown, 7 thick-banded)
- 44 laurelwood
- 7 unidentified beans
- 3 calabashes
- 3 gray nickar nuts
- 3 starnut palm
- 2 mammee apple
- 1 cabbagebark
- 4 kapok prickles or thorns
- 1 Cathie's bean, *Canavalia nitida*

The boat count in the Georgetown area was down from 400 in past years to about 250 this year. This was no doubt due to high fuel cost and slow economy. Many Canadian boats showed up this year thanks to their strong dollar.

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### **On a Flotsam Collection Beach: Matagorda Island, Texas**

by Curt Ebbesmeyer, [curtisebbesmeyer@comcast.net](mailto:curtisebbesmeyer@comcast.net)

During a thirty-year period (1955-1985), oceanographers released more than 85,000 messages in bottles into the Gulf of Mexico. Many collected onto the Great Bend of Texas on Matagorda Island. Because of this aggregation, oceanographers began calling this stretch of Texas, a flotsam collection beach.

For years, I wanted to visit this fabled collection beach. Finally, I went because fellow beachcomber Mike Burnett lives at nearby Port O'Connor, a four-hour drive southwest from Houston. At the Beachcombers' Fun Fair in March 2007, Mike invited me and three combers for four days

(June 19-24, 2007): John Anderson, a plumber from Forks, Washington; Dave Ingraham, who runs a janitorial service in Seattle; and Bill Blazek, a civil engineer retired in Jupiter, Florida.



Matagorda Island is now part of the *Aransas National Wildlife Refuge*. One of its primary missions is to protect the highly endangered Kemp's Ridley sea turtles. Because they number only a handful, Mike and other volunteers routinely patrol the 38 miles of shoreline facing the Gulf of Mexico.

Several weeks before we were to go, the Public Broadcasting Station KCET in Los Angeles got wind of our trip and wanted to go along to film a 12-minute episode they were calling *Extreme Beachcombing*. They sent a four-man crew to film me beachcombing. Before they arrived they thought beachcombing was staying in a hotel room and beachcombing a nearby beach for a few hours a day.

Managers of the Refuge invited us to stay for a couple of days at the camp on Matagorda Island. Mike and Sam Burnett outfitted the expedition for the ten of us including bedding, food, and other necessities.

In two days beachcombing, we found 1,000 hard hats lost from workers on the thousands of oil platforms of Louisiana and Texas, 800 sea beans rained into the water from tropical jungles, a tail section of a downed aircraft, wrecked shrimp boat, a dozen lost navigational markers, 30 computer monitors, and a TV screen. This is the merest tip of the trash iceberg.

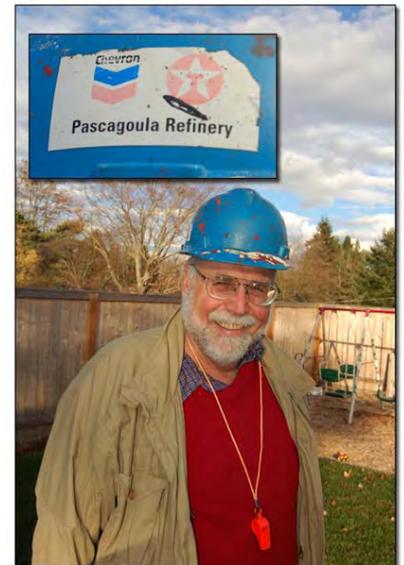
During May 15-19, 2008, John and Debbie Anderson visited Matagorda Island. With Mike Burnett as guide, they beachcombed 700 total beans consisting of 35 total species. They found the equivalent of 70 beans per person per day.

There is so much trash there it is like looking into the face of civilization. I maintain that this trash is the glyph of humanity and that we have not yet learned to read. We'd better if we are to survive. It is like the glyphs on the pyramids before Champollion learned to read them.

The PBS crew filmed more than 20 hours. The first day they had trouble understanding beachcombing because they had tightly scripted the show back in Los Angeles. The second day they learned to go with the flow and appreciated what we found. As an example, the host Ziya Tong each morning got on heavy make up. In the heat and sand—90 degrees, heavy rain, 90 percent humidity—her makeup became granular. She constantly had to duck into the air-conditioned truck to maintain continuity with her initial makeup.

As the shoot progressed, I explained beachcombing is learning to notice, to see, to be curious. Curiosity begs questions. A question or two leads directly to the frontier of knowledge, the cutting edge of science. Almost everything on the beach is like this. This is why I feel I am rediscovering the ocean through beachcombing.

Five of the world's seven sea turtle species are found in the Gulf of Mexico: leatherback, hawksbill, green, loggerhead and Kemp's Ridley. The reason we were able to film on Matagorda Island is that Mike is a volunteer team member of the Matagorda Island Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Patrol. The island is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department and is part of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. He and others patrol the



beaches on Matagorda Island in search of endangered Kemp's Ridley turtles or their nests, which they find by spotting their tracks on the beach. Mike was fortunate enough to find the first documented live nesting Kemp's Ridley turtle on Matagorda Island, and found the first wild (never been tagged before) nesting turtle!

Matagorda Island was formed about 4,500 years ago. The first peoples to inhabit the barrier island were the nomadic Karankawas who gathered fruits and roots, hunted birds and mammals with bow and arrow, and made cane weirs to trap fish, turtles, and shellfish. They were coastal specialists utilizing local sea foods, plants, and shells to survive the tough environment. Their first contact with Europeans was in the winter of 1528 when they met two boatloads of half-dead Spaniards from the Narvaez expedition. Later more survivors came in, including Cabeza de Vaca. In 1685, Frenchman La Salle established a camp on the northern tip of Matagorda Island while his ships were navigating Pass Cavallo. Later years brought colonizers and conflict. The Spanish tried to missionize the Karankawas. Eventually, through disease, harassment, social disintegration, genetic dilution, habitat destruction, and utter despair, the Karankawas were gone.

<b>Sea Bean Totals for Matagorda Island</b>				
The grand total of 831 beans for three beaners searching three days works out to be 92 beans per person per day. We combed a third of the 30-mile-long Matagorda Island. Ten beaners scattered along the entire shore exploring for five days (50 beaner-days) might be expected to find 4,617 beans.				
Bean	Total for 3 beaners	Bill Blazek	Mike Burnett	John Anderson
Hearts	195	50	35	110
Starnuts	158	47	18	93
Hamburgers	252	45	61	146
Gray nickers	12	3	1	8
Brown nickers	6	2	2	2
Purses	30	7	8	15
Marys	5	1	3	1
nut meg	2		2	
unknown	4	2	2	
thick band	2	1	1	
black hamburger	2			2
oxy	1		1	
lumbarg	4	3		1
<b>Total number of beans</b>	<b>831</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>472</b>
<b>Total number of species</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>

In 1942, most of Matagorda Island was taken over for use by the U.S. Air Force. For thirty years, it was off-limits to the public, and was managed by the military as the Matagorda Bombing and Gunnery Range. There were several runways, 44 buildings, cement bunkers, signal beacons, and spotting towers spread over most the island.

Trash on Matagorda Island originated from great distances around the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. On this trip we found the following: 1. Message in a bottle (MIB) from central Gulf of Mexico 600 miles away; 2. MIB from Montserrat 2,000 miles away; 3. Sea Pig from Venezuela 2,000 miles away. Blue species 4.5 inches from snout to tail. Hechi en Venezuela, Bisanti. See article in *The Drifting Seed*, May 2003; 4. Hard hat from Pascagoula Chevron Refinery 500 miles to the east. Chevron's refinery, one of 10 affected by Katrina, safely shut down prior to landfall. Its more than 1,200 employees and contractors are working hard to bring the 325,000-barrel-a-day facility back on stream, despite the complete destruction of many of their

homes. Two Gulf Coast refineries—Chevron Corp.'s 325,000-barrel per day (bpd) Pascagoula, Mississippi, facility and Conoco / Phillips' 255,000-bpd a day Alliance refinery in Belle Chasse, La., suffered "major damage," in Katrina.

**Matagorda Island Flotsam Collage.** Left to right, top to bottom: 1) **Mike Burnett** holding a message in a bottle launched off the island of Montserrat on December 14, 2006, by **Chris Holdby, John Holland, Katrina Inglis, Kevin Wilkins, and Paul Davis**; 2) ampule; 3) piggy bank; 4) derelict fishing vessel; 5) head of toy bunny; 6) emergency kit to suture a wound; 7) Classic-brand soccer ball, sea beans, whistles from life vests used in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina; 8) Mike Burnett with Curt Ebbesmeyer holding the tail section of a downed aircraft found in the dunes. Dave Ingraham photos.

**Curt wearing hard hat** lost from the Pascagoula Refinery during Hurricane Katrina. An estimated 1,000 hard hats washed up along the 30-mile coast of Matagorda Island. Curt's wearing one of the Katrina emergency whistles from one of the dozens of life vests lost in New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina and later washed up on Matagorda Island. Dave Ingraham photo.  
*The Drifting Seed*, 14.3, December 2008

**The Drifting Seed in Sussex, Southeast England**  
by Ed & Bidy Jarzembowski, EdJarzembowski@maidstone.gov.uk

Drifting seeds and fruits are less well-known in southeast England than in the southwest (e.g. Cornwall) or in western Ireland. We started recording them a couple of years ago when we shifted our domestic energy dependency towards driftwood rather than oil. Our collecting area (strandline) is about 5 miles (8 km) long as the crow flies, extending from Newhaven to the Seven Sisters, and including Seaford Bay and Cuckmere Haven, with estuarine, bar and platform shores. It is on the Channel coast of East Sussex at approximately longitude 55° 46' N and latitude 0° 06' E, and exposed to southwesterly gales especially in autumn. Alternate stretches of beach are walked around low water normally at weekends, especially in winter.

The driftseeds include transatlantic and local ones, as well as human refuse and losses. We have therefore not counted coconut, hazel (cob) nut, pines, bamboo, peach, mango or prayer bead in our tally. Ivory nuts and fossil seeds are also found—see separate communications.

The true driftseeds are uncommon, so far comprising sea heart (*Entada gigas*), brown hamburger bean (*Mucuna sloanei*), starnut palm (*Astrocaryum* sp.), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), sea purse (*Dioclea reflexa*) and a pod of the forest flame (*Delonix regia*) (Figure 1). Of these, we have only encountered the sea heart in successive years along our collecting patch—on four beaches, usually as solitary specimens. The hamburger bean, starnut and sea purse are unique finds on the east side of the estuary of the River Cuckmere which is both relatively sheltered and undeveloped (at present). In contrast, the extensive rock platform and reefs below the chalk cliffs are too exposed for productive strandline deposits. The walnut and pod are single occurrences on shingle bars.

We expect our small flora to grow in the future and should welcome news of other records from SE England, especially Kent, as drifting seeds surely pass through the Straits of Dover on the way to The Netherlands. We are grateful to Ed Perry for help with identification and encouragement to write this note.



Figure 1. Part of a pod of Royal Poinciana or Flame of the Forest (*Delonix regia*); our thanks to Fred Clouter for image enhancement.

## News and Notes

### From Patty Foreman (ibis037@yahoo.com):

I was lucky to be able to spend the month of August on Clearwater Beach. Lucky because Ike and Gus, 2008 hurricanes, both went up the Gulf of Mexico. Because of this we had strong west winds for most of the month.



This made beachcombing a special delight. One day while walking the wrackline there was an especially large amount of trash—old trash that looked like it had been out in the Gulf forever. That same day there were also some sea coconuts, an oddity on our beaches, and much to my surprise the first seaheart I have ever found on the Gulf Coast of Florida. Continuing on along the beach I met a fellow beachcomber picking up trash and after sharing seabeen information with her I gave her the seaheart. She was very pleased. You just never know what a day of beachcombing will turn up. I would be interested in information about other seabeen finds on Florida Gulf beaches.

P.S. In response to the May 2008, vol. 14.1 issue, pg. 12 on the size of a Mary's bean—checking my collection I have two—31 mm maybe even 32 mm Mary's beans—also one that is very small, 20 mm.

P.P.S. Ed—We were on our way to the symposium when our van broke down. We were held up for a couple of days waiting on parts. Hope to see you next year. Patty & Ted

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### More from Ed Jarzembowski (EdJarzembowski@maidstone.gov.uk): Sunny afternoon!

I couldn't resist this one for *The Drifting Seed* whilst glancing at back notes to help with our forthcoming article...

Dennis (1998 and Cadée cited therein) are quite right to attribute north Atlantic and southern North Sea ivory nuts to shipwrecks. I enclose a good case in point. The *Peruvian* was loaded with thousands of them from Ecuador and sailing for Germany when she came to grief in Seaford Bay, E. Sussex, UK, in 1899. Unsalvaged nuts were washed up for years afterwards and resulted in a celebrated local art movement in miniature paintings examples of which can be seen in Seaford and Newhaven museums. To our



*The Drifting Seed*, 14.3, December 2008

surprise, the nuts are still occasionally coming up in Seaford Bay today after winter storms, over one hundred years later. We owe this discovery to observing peckish beach birds—see beak marks on nut—and are indebted to Fred Clouter for enhancing our photographs.

Reference: Dennis, J. V. 1998. Records of ivory-nut palm seeds from southeastern Virginia, USA, beaches. *The Drifting Seed*, December, 8-9.



## News and Notes (continued)

### From Julie and Carmen Pennella, Port St. Lucie, Florida (Nunagram@aol.com):

We've been collecting sea beans for only 8 years but it's become a passion. We have a large variety and try to keep at least 3 of each kind with the exception of the hamburger and the seaheart. As I read your newsletters and hear of all those great finds I often say to myself "*They must be exaggerating.*" We roam the beaches from Fort Pierce to Stuart and during peak season (Oct-Nov) we may gather 40-to 50-hamburgers and hearts. That always seemed to satisfy us.

Oct 4<sup>th</sup> we left for a 5-day stay in Grand Cayman. We've been there before and usually don't come back with much.

This time we booked our stay at a quaint little place (Turtle Nest Inn) on the southeast side of the island. After traveling we were greeted by the owner with a glass of wine and we headed to the patio to relax. Well that didn't happen. I saw the whole shoreline covered with seaweed and driftwood and was told it was all dumped from the storms. Well, with wine in hand I couldn't sit still without taking a peek. I was down by the water's edge when, after a few minutes, my husband saw me jump for joy. Hamburgers and hearts were everywhere. I was like a kid in a candy shop. Joined by my husband we were both in disbelief and were picking them up with vigor. Two little island boys around 5 & 6 watched us for awhile, then totally curious, they looked at me with those big brown eyes and said "Lady what are you looking for?" I showed them the beans, they shrugged their shoulders like we were a little crazy but started helping us collect them. "Why do you want these lady?" I answered, "Because they make us happy." They seemed very puzzled because everyone was raking them up and throwing them away. The one boy said if you rub a bean on a piece of wood it would start a fire. I didn't ask him to prove his theory.

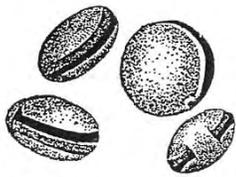
After talking to the owner of our hotel it seems Hurricane Gustav was the one to thank for our bounty. No one else around seemed to appreciate the beauty of these little beans so we collected for

4 days. We returned home with **704** hamburgers and **202** hearts. I now no longer doubt the stories in your newsletter and am proud to be a collector of sea beans. Ed Perry has been most gracious in helping us identify some of our less common finds. Thank you so much.

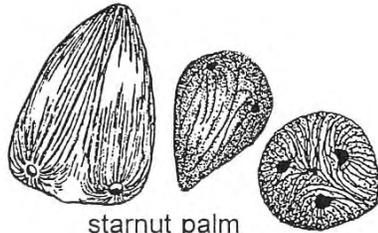


Simple Guide to Common Drift Seeds

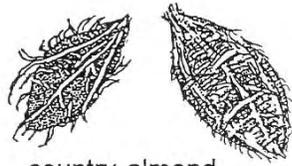
(Illustrations by Cathie Katz and Pamela J. Paradine)



hamburger bean  
(*Mucuna* spp.)



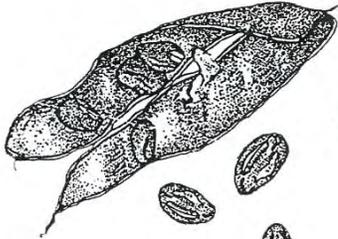
starnut palm  
(*Astrocaryum* spp.)



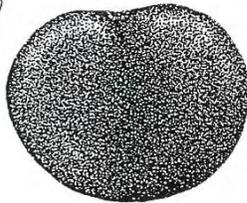
country almond  
(*Terminalia catappa*)



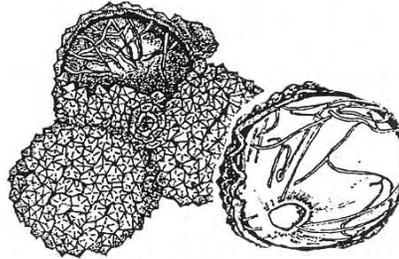
sea pearl/pod  
(*Caesalpinia bonduc*)



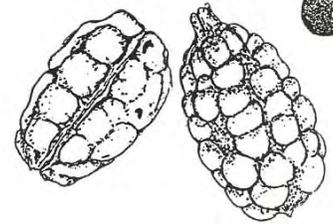
bay bean/pod  
(*Canavalia rosea*)



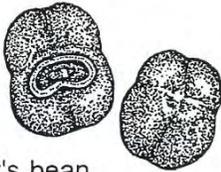
sea heart  
(*Entada gigas*)



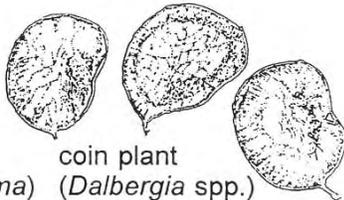
golfball/pod  
(*Manicaria saccifera*)



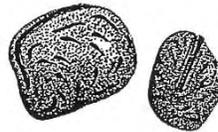
hand grenade  
(*Sacoglottis amazonica*)



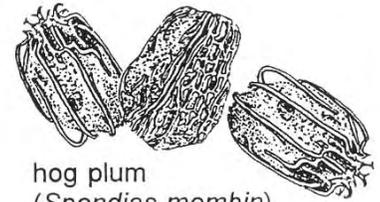
Mary's bean  
(*Merremia discoidesperma*)



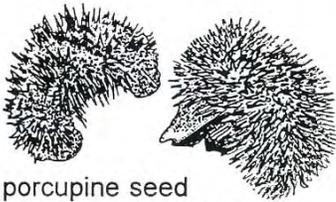
coin plant  
(*Dalbergia* spp.)



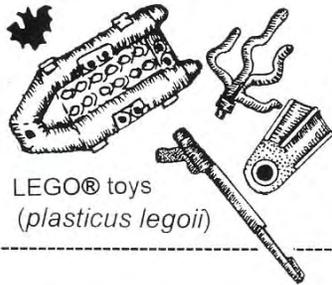
sea purse  
(*Dioclea reflexa*)



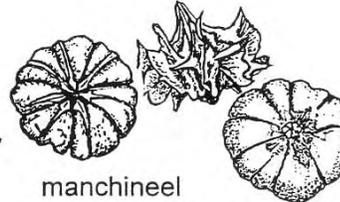
hog plum  
(*Spondias mombin*)



porcupine seed  
(*Caryocar microcarpum*)



LEGO® toys  
(*plasticus legoii*)



manchineel  
(*Hippomane mancinella*)

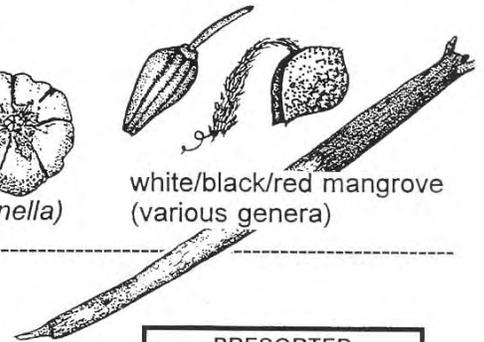
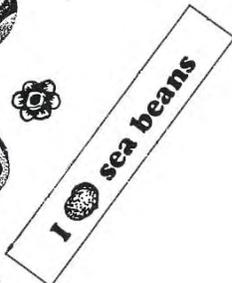


white/black/red mangrove  
(various genera)



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