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Smithsonian Scientist Receives 2008 Medal for Excellence in Tropical Botany

Mireya Correa, staff scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute since 1987 and professor at the University of Panama, received the José Cuatrecasas Medal for Excellence in Tropical Botany April 26, 2008. Laurance J. Dorr, representing the National Museum of Natural History and the United States National Herbarium, presented the award at the Smithsonian Botanical Symposium held at the museum.

José Cuatrecasas (1903-1996), pioneering botanist and plant taxonomist, worked at the Smithsonian Institution's Department of Botany for nearly half a century. In his honor, the José Cuatrecasas Medal for Excellence in Tropical Botany is presented annually to a botanist and scholar of international stature who has contributed significantly to advancing the field of tropical botany.

Correa pioneered formal botanical studies in Panama and has trained a large cadre of professional botanists. In 1967, she co-founded the University of Panama herbarium, which houses 70,000 plant specimens. In 1968, she joined the staff of the U.S. Army Tropical Test Center Herbarium. Under the 1979 Panama Canal Treaties, this smaller herbarium was relocated to Smithsonian facilities in Panama City.

Correa is the co-author of an extensive list of publications, including "The Botany and Natural History of Panama," with William G. D'Arcy; the "Catálogo de las plantas vasculares de Panama," with Carmen Galdames and Maria Stapf; and a monograph of *Drosera* (Droseraceae) for the Flora Neotropica, with Tânia Regina and Santos Silva.

Together with the Bioinformatics Office and Noris Salazar, who also holds a joint position at the institute and at the University of Panama, Correa created an online database of 12,000 digitalized specimen records for the tropical research institute's herbarium, which also provides direct access to the records of the University of Panama herbarium.

Correa has actively encouraged local, regional and international collaborations, including the Organization of the Flora Neotropica. As a result of her efforts, the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute is the regional hub for the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Latin American Plant Initiative,

which will transform research and teaching by gathering high-resolution scans of all botanical type specimens from Latin America into a single, online database.

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, headquartered in Panama City, Panama, is a unit of the Smithsonian Institution. The Institute furthers the understanding of tropical nature and its importance to human welfare, trains students to conduct research in the tropics and promotes conservation by increasing public awareness of the beauty and importance of tropical ecosystems.

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