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REMAINS OF A RAINBOW

U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN SHOWCASES PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAITS OF RARE & ENDANGERED PLANTS AND ANIMALS OF HAWAI'I

August 8, 2003 - Washington, DC - *Remains of a Rainbow: Rare Plants and Animals of Hawai'i*, by Endangered Species Project photographers David Liittschwager and Susan Middleton, is the name of both a book and an exhibit. The nationally traveling exhibit will be on view at the United States Botanic Garden on the National Mall in Washington, DC from August 29, 2003 through January 11, 2004.

These exceptional photographers capture native plants and animals in dramatic and dignified images. For example, a close-up of a lehua blossom transforms that beautiful bottle-brush flower into a starburst of fireworks. And the koa bug series of photographs is truly amazing. From a celadon-green egg cluster, the nymphs emerge in a mass that recalls grade-school models of atoms, with the neurons and protons rendered in Halloween colors, and one little bug looking like an electron rotating around the nucleus. Remember the transformer toys that could change from one kind of robot to another? Entering its adult stage, the koa bug leaves behind one of those "robots" and emerges into an almost luminescent, then iridescent creature.

The rainbow-eye damselfly really does have colorful eyes and many other brilliantly detailed parts, the scientific names of which an entomologist could whip out in a flash. Even though it doesn't take a scientist to enjoy and relate to the photographs -- kids are going to love it -- the photo duo spent most of their time with scientists, getting it right. "Scientists are engaged in the world because they love these creatures," says Liittschwager. "It fascinates their minds and engages their souls, and that's very inspiring. It's a blast to be around that level of enthusiasm."

Middleton agrees. "I love working with these scientists, because that's how we learn about what we're doing," she says. "They're the ones who are educating us about the habits and the habitats of these plants and animals. They're the ones who guide us to them."

Finding just the right time for the koa bugs to emerge, or getting the timing right on the blossoming of the scarlet *Kokia drynarioides* -- only two populations with a total of about five individuals remain -- required making the right connections and going off the beaten path.

Middleton recalls one of the first places the team worked in, a bog habitat in the West Maui mountains. Deeply stirred by it, she felt privileged to see natural communities intact. "I think of it as places where the symphony is still playing, where all of those evolutionary relationships are still evident and it looks harmonious," she says. "It seemed like these places were created by some master landscape architect, and of course, it's evolution. I hadn't seen very many places like this, with that kind of complexity and diversity evident."

The book leading to this exhibit was a collaborative effort with scientists and institutions that stretched over five years -- longer, if you count the time Middleton and Liittschwager spent photographing in the Hawaiian Islands in 1993, when they were working on *Witness: Endangered Species of North America*, their last book. *Remains of a Rainbow* was published by the National Geographic Society, in association with Environmental Defense and with the assistance of the National Tropical Botanical Garden and The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i. Two pages of acknowledgments read like a list of who's who in science in Hawai'i, plus all of the supportive institutions and people whose contributions made the book a reality.

For consideration of the 140 species photographed for the book, many of which appear in the exhibit, Middleton and Liittschwager relied heavily on scientists. Before coming to Hawai'i, the pair had used the publicly available federal listing of endangered species. But they didn't restrict themselves only to species that were listed; they also included species that have not made it through the listing process but are known to be equally threatened. One example is the rare Hawaiian Happyface Spider. Although school-children across Hawai'i know it, and it's celebrated in song, hula, art, poetry, and puppetry, it has no legal status. "We needed to rely on the first-hand knowledge of the field experts, the people who were really in the front lines, who know what's new and what's rare, when it hasn't even been officially acknowledged yet," says Middleton.

The duo celebrated the national debut of the *Remains of a Rainbow* exhibit, organized by Umbrage Books, at the Honolulu Academy of Arts in October 2001. Since then, the exhibit has been traveling the nation. On opening night, in three contiguous galleries, 92 photographs varying in size from 20 inches to seven feet tall first gave witness to Hawai'i's endangered species. "We're lucky to be able to photograph and share with people beautiful things, and there's an urgency to it that's understood, so it's not so obscure," says Liittschwager.

Whether discussing the book or the exhibit -- or the 30-minute film the two have produced about the project and which is part of the exhibit -- quality and intent of purpose shine through the Rainbow project. If one counts the pair's first visit to Hawai'i on another project, their work has been almost a decade of a labor of love. It would have to be love. Bearing 70-pound packs on razorback ridges and into steep valleys, toting 10 cases of equipment and supplies back and forth from the mainland, being wet, dirty, and



uncomfortable while shooting about 2,500 rolls of film and then sorting it to arrive at images to use in the book, exhibit, and slide presentations -- the list never ends.

Here's an example: more funding unexpectedly arrives that will allow Liittschwager and Middleton to increase the number of pictures in the exhibit. Liittschwager is waiting for the first of two seven-foot-long panels of the endangered *Santalum freycinetianum* var. *lanaiense* -- the sandalwood tree -- to come out of the printer. It'll take five hours for this first panel, plus five more for the second. Four populations of sandalwood remain in the Islands, with about 275 individuals in each population. Once abundant in Hawai'i, the sandalwood trade in the late 18th and early 19th centuries nearly wiped it out. The print is a go. If it hadn't been up to his exacting standards, Liittschwager would have tossed it and started over. If only the sandalwood itself could start over -- or any of the other disappearing species highlighted in both the *Remains of a Rainbow* book and exhibit.

At the very least, the Rainbow project is a pleasing yet haunting series of images. But at its highest and best use, *Remains of a Rainbow* is a call to action. That call can start anywhere, according to the photographers. Some examples are weeding invasive species in pockets of native forest, planting a garden, learning about plants and insects, joining a conservation-minded organization, voting in a conservation-oriented manner, and more.

Being an endangered species photographer is, of course, itself a call to action. Middleton and Liittschwager came to Hawai'i of their own calling, but even so, Middleton says once she arrived in the Islands, she felt a profound change take place in her understanding of what endangered species and native ecosystems are about. "Hawai'i captured my heart, but it also captured my mind and it captured my imagination," she says. "With the guidance of field biologists, I could almost see and understand for the first time the evolutionary frenzy, sort of evolutionary miracle that occurred in the Islands and I really understood why it's important to understand the distinction between what's native and what's not native. Native things --- plants and animals that evolved in a place -- are the real expressions of that place. They're what give that place its unique character, and I really understood that for the first time when I was in Hawai'i, so it changed my life utterly."

The United States Botanic Garden Conservatory is open to the public, free of charge, every day of the year from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Conservatory is located at 100 Maryland Avenue, SW, at the foot of the U.S. Capitol on the National Mall. Visitors are encouraged to take Metrobus and Metrorail. Further information is available by calling 202-225-8333 or visiting our web site at www.usbg.gov.

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