

## Hunt for the Dwarf Victoria Waterlily

Friday, Jan. 29, 2010, 5:30 p.m., EST

For 10 days we boarded narrow tenders to explore the Brazilian rainforest and search for the elusive dwarf Amazon waterlily. (Courtesy of Trevor Cole) [Click here for slideshow](#)Success! (Courtesy of Trevor Cole)Travel is part of my nature. I travel for business, for pleasure, to relax, to discover and to explore.

During one of my most interesting excursions, I joined horticulturalists Don Bryne of Sewanee Laboratories and Patrick Nutt, a 33-year veteran of Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pa., on an expedition to the Brazilian Amazon in search of the elusive dwarf Victoria waterlily, a new waterlily species never before identified.

Twenty of us braved the heat, humidity, giant mosquitoes, poisonous water snakes and our wives' wrath for being away on Valentine's Day in a quest to find the mysterious waterlily. We flew to Manaus in the heart of the Amazon rainforest and boarded a local boat called 'The Dorinda' piloted by Captain Mo, an affable local who was an expert on the river.

For 10 days, we cruised the waters of this wide, powerful river, past the Marriage of the Waters, where the muddy Amazon and the black Rio Negro merge to form the world's largest river. Three or four times a day, starting at dawn, we boarded narrow tenders to explore the rainforest and search for waterlilies.

At some points, we had to hoist the canoes up and over giant tree roots that were taller than us. Other times, we had to wade chest-deep into the muddy water to navigate hidden tributaries and ponds.

We showered in river water, swam in the shallows, fished for our meals and explored rural villages where grocery stores were nothing more than floating boats plying their wares up and down the river.

Finally, the discovery. Near the confluence of the Rio Branco and Rio Negro, in a hidden backwater lake and obscured by tall grasses, we found a cluster of dwarf Victorias. Wide leaves with a deep red rib, they were growing in partial shade in the dense jungle.

The second day color was a pale pink rather than deep red. We carefully harvested seeds for DNA testing back in the United States. The initial analysis indicates that this might be a fourth subspecies of the Victoria genus. Exciting? You'd better believe it.