



December 9, 2025, 12 p.m. ET, 11 a.m. CT, 10 a.m. MT, 9 a.m. PT
Plants Out of Place: Communicating Effectively About Invasive Species

The past, present, and future of invasive plants in our ecosystems is defined by human actions and notions of stewardship. Yet, public skepticism and mistrust towards the field of invasion biology have been heightened by pervasive criticism from within the social sciences, humanities, popular media, and by extension, the general public.

Thanks to support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, Dr. Mason Heberling initiated a new project at Carnegie Museum of Natural History focused on increasing public awareness of invasive plants. During this webinar, Dr. Heberling will share outcomes and some lessons learned in connection to the changing scientific perspectives on the categorization and perceived threats of invasive plants and highlight the need for updated, inclusive communication strategies.

As an added feature, this program will highlight these strategies, experiments and collaborations that led to a new museum exhibition, *Uprooted: Plants Out of Place*. The exhibit integrates historical-scientific narratives through archival objects and museum specimens and recontextualizes the museum's Hall of Botany of plant-centric dioramas dating from the 1920s that portray idealized plant communities devoid of humans - including the role of human responsibility and agency, invasive plants as passengers, the role of language in shaping attitudes, and other cultural points of view.



Mason Heberling, Ph.D., Associate Curator, Section of Botany, Carnegie Museum of Natural History

Mason Heberling is the associate curator in the Section of Botany at Carnegie Museum of Natural History. Heberling received his Ph.D. from Syracuse University in Biology in 2015, and a B.S. from Penn State in Biology (Ecology) in 2010. He conducted postdoctoral research at the University of Tennessee Knoxville in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and in the Section of Botany at Carnegie Museum of Natural History. In addition to his primary role as curator at CMNH, Heberling is also an adjunct associate professor

in the Department of Biological Sciences at University of Pittsburgh and an adjunct scientist at Carnegie Mellon University's Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation.

Heberling is a plant ecologist and botanist whose research explores plant functional strategies in deciduous forest understories, especially in the context of environmental change. Using herbarium specimens, field experiments, and observational data, much of his current research focuses on the ecology and evolution of non-native, invasive plants in the eastern United States, the ecophysiological strategies of the herbaceous layer in deciduous forests, and the impacts of climate change on the timing of leafing out and flowering in temperate deciduous forests. Heberling was awarded the prestigious Mercer Award in 2020 from the Ecological Society of America in recognition of his research on phenological mismatches between trees and understory wildflowers caused by climate change.

Heberling is particularly interested in innovative uses for natural history collections and rethinking how we collect museum specimens. He has strong and diverse interests in the longstanding and emerging roles of herbaria in the current era of rapid biodiversity change.