

San Diego State botanists name plant discovery after Jimi Hendrix

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A succulent discovered in Mexico more than 20 years ago by San Diego State University botany students may look small, but its name evokes a towering figure in music.

Mark Doder, a senior biologist with the environmental consulting firm Recon, was listening to Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Child" while driving with fellow students Kim Marsden and Scott and Brenda McMillan in 1995 when they pulled over to investigate a mesa in the Colonel Peninsula, about 70 miles south of Ensenada.

Having already discovered one new succulent species a few years earlier, Doder said he saw something about the terrain that made him think he might find another.

He sensed his hunch was right after he hiked up the mesa and came upon a little plant that didn't look like other *Dudleya*, a genus of succulent.

Twenty one years later, his discovery was recognized in a paper recently published by the California Botanical Society's publication *Madrono*. University of California, Santa Cruz professor Stephen McCabe, a co-author of the paper, "re-discovered" the plant in the same area after Doder's original discovery.

They named the plant *Dudleya hendrixii*, or "Hendrix's live forever," in honor of the late guitarist.

SDSU professor Michael Simpson, Dodero's teacher at the time of the discovery and another co-author of the paper, said it's unusual to name a plant after a popular musician, but there's no rule against it.

While Dodero said he wasn't thinking of it at the time, naming the plant after Hendrix has had some residual benefits in the publicity he's already received.

Simpson welcomes the attention.

"This has been an opportunity to promote what we do," he said. "And also, we have an opportunity to promote the need for preserving these plants."

The *Dudleya hendrixii* is in an undeveloped area that the Mexican government has considered as a site for the largest port in the country. If developed, Dodero said more than 200,000 people could move into the area within the next 20 years.

Dodero said he never got around to publishing a paper on the plant until this year because work and life got in the way. He was sparked to action because of recent efforts to help preserve the area.

"It's a very tiny town with one traffic light," Dodero said. "It would have been a major development down there. Hopefully, this gives some impetus for preserving this portion of the mesa."

Dodero has been working with Terra Peninsular, a conservation group that is trying to buy land in the peninsula to keep it from being developed.

Simpson said that although the plant is only known to exist on two acres, it may be difficult to get the Mexican government to identify it as

endangered.

"I just talked to a colleague who said that's very difficult to do," he said. "There's a lot of bureaucracy."

The plant also could be listed as rare and in danger of extinction by the California Native Plant Society, and some botanists in Mexico are working at starting their own chapter of the organization, Simpson said.

Dodero said he believes the plant and surrounding land are worth saving.

"You never know," he said. "They find medicine in [plants](#). We want to preserve biodiversity. Plus, it's a beautiful place."

New plant discoveries don't happen regularly, but aren't uncommon. Simpson said about two are discovered each year in California, and the *Dudleya hendrxi* is one of three new species reported in the latest Madrono.

Dodero and Simpson previously had discovered a new species, *Dudleya crassisolia*, which they also wrote about in Madrono.

Still a Hendrix fan, Dodero said he thinks the guitarist would appreciate having a plant named after him and the efforts to preserve the land it is on from development.

"You listen to his words, and a lot of times he's talking about the environment and how it's getting messed up," he said.

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