

Tributes to a Beloved Colorado Botanist: Tass Kelso

Botanist and professor Tass Kelso, passed away in June. Tass was a remarkable botanist and a remarkable person, whose friendship, research, and fine teaching skills touched the lives of many people. Below are some tributes from her friends and colleagues.

Tass Kelso: The Loss of a Dear Friend by Jack Carter

On June 8th we lost Sylvia "Tass" Kelso to pancreatic cancer, and what a terrible loss it was for so many reasons. Beyond being an outstanding teacher and distinguished scholar and investigator in the plant sciences, Tass had a personality and demeanor that made it a real joy to work with her. She had a gentle and quiet attitude towards learning that enticed students and faculty alike to want to join her in the study of plants and the conservation of the natural world. She also had the disposition and presence, plus an academic background, that fit into the liberal arts and science college campus.

Her undergraduate degree from Dartmouth College, a Master's Degree from the University of Colorado, (where she studied under Bill Weber), and a PhD from the University of Alaska prepared her for the Colorado College setting. In 1987, when she arrived on campus, she brought with her an enthusiasm for the alpine and arctic flora of the Rocky Mountains, and she had a deep interest in maintaining and contributing to the Jack L. Carter Herbarium. Tass was a member of the Botanical Society of America, the American Society of Plant Taxonomy, and the Colorado Native Plant Society.

She devoted many years to the study of systematics and reproductive biology of the Primulaceae, and published several important papers addressing the variation and evolution within the taxon. Throughout her tenure at Colorado College she continued to study the vascular flora of the Pikes Peak region, recently publishing *Peak to Prairie: Botanical Landscapes of the Pikes Peak Region*, and *Flora of the Pikes Peak Region*, which are publications that will stand the test of time. The quality of the written word, the illustrations, and the photos in these papers reflect the knowledge and skills of Tass Kelso at her best.



Tass Kelso
Photo © Loraine Yeatts, 2006

Tass is survived by her wonderful partner and husband, George Maentz, who has joined with her through the years to form a powerful team.

Memorial gifts in her memory may be made to the Tass Kelso Fund for the Study of Plant Diversity in the Pikes Peak Region at Colorado College (Colorado College Advancement, 14 East Cache La Poudre St., Colorado Springs, CO 80903-3294) or to a conservation organization

of the donor's choice.

I have always been pleased that the faculty at Colorado College selected Tass to replace me in my retirement, for ours has been a wonderful friendship.

Jack Carter is professor emeritus, Colorado College, and author of the [Trees & Shrubs of Colorado](#).



Tass Kelso
Photo courtesy of George Maentz



Tass Kelso leading a CoNPS field trip
Photo © Loraine Yeatts, 2006

Tribute to Tass Kelso, Botanist, Master Teacher, Mentor, and Friend

by M. Shane Heschel and Candace Galen

Sylvia "Tass" Kelso, Professor Emerita of Organismal Biology & Ecology (OBE) at Colorado College, died in June 2016. Tass was a member of the Biology/OBE Departments for 29 years, where as a teacher, scholar, and advisor she helped hundreds of students over the course of her career to become better scholars and stewards of the Earth through the study of botany.

The geography of her life spanned the breadth of the U.S., ranging from coastal New England to the Alaskan tundra to the mountains and prairies of Colorado. After graduating from Dartmouth College,



Photo by George Maentz

she began sharing her love of learning with elementary school students in New Hampshire. Eventually, her interest in plant diversity and the habitats sustaining it led to a Master's Degree from the University of Colorado and PhD in Botany at the University of Alaska. There, her investigations of arctic and alpine flora took shape, launching a research program that eventually led to more than 50 publications and professional reports. Her research largely focused on the biogeography of alpine flora, including habitat requirements, plant-pollinator relationships, species distributions, and phylogenetics. Tass' expertise in the genus *Primula* encompassed detailed studies of its ecology, breeding systems and taxonomy that spanned three continents and drew upon morphological and genetic studies. Moving beyond the "true" primroses, Tass' interest in edaphic specialization drew her attention to a rare evening primrose, *Oenothera harringtonii*, endemic to the silty prairies of southeastern Colorado. Through the medium of this plant, Tass established a large collaborative team ("Dimensions of Biodiversity") whose comparative studies of *Oenothera* have stretched across western North America.



Photo by Candace Galen 2006

Tass' love of evolutionary biology and systematics was further expressed in her work with herbaria, which she began as a graduate student at the University of Colorado Museum in Boulder. Tass was a champion for herbaria and trained dozens of students in the finer points of plant collections. At Colorado College, Tass' curatorial work with the Jack Carter Herbarium was instrumental in establishing it as a national resource for studies of Southwestern flora.

As a botanist, evolutionary biologist, and conservation scientist, Tass was deeply committed to preserving the biodiversity of alpine, grassland, and riparian systems in Colorado. For this work she was recognized as an Outstanding Volunteer by the Colorado Natural Heritage Program. In addition to training botanists who have continued in their educations as graduate students and practicing conservation stewards, Tass, her husband George Maentz, and her students have developed detailed management plans for many parks and open spaces in Colorado. In Colorado Springs alone, Tass and George's efforts led to the preservation of several parks and open spaces, such as the land adjoining the University of Colorado and Red Rock Canyon. Their work continues to conserve important and amazingly diverse habitats. Her efforts as a teacher-scholar will richly benefit generations of botanists and lovers of plant biodiversity.

Tass and George welcomed botanists from afar into their home and accompanied them in exploring the Rocky Mountain flora. Visitors were rewarded with evening pollination performances by hawk moths and yucca moths, followed by morning con-



Photo by Candace Galen

versation over hearty cups of espresso and walks that revealed glimpses of rare and elusive plants hidden in the wetlands, fens, meadows and alpine habitats of Colorado.

Tass' passion for teaching was infectious and her students and colleagues richly benefited from their interactions with Tass. A John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Professor at Colorado College, Tass was a master teacher who regularly taught courses in botany, evolution, and conservation biology, and was able to inspire every student in the room with a quiet confidence and a respect for learning styles that was superseded only by her love of plants. Tass' influence as a mentor has been long lasting and transformative. She was a demanding but gentle advisor who modeled hard work, attention to detail, and thoughtfulness for generations of students. Her love of the natural world, her enthusiasm for botany, and her great talents and generosity shaped many lives and careers.



Tass Kelso Photo by George Maentz 2002

The botany community has lost a master teacher/scholar, a champion for biodiversity, and a wonderful person who saw great beauty in the world.

Contributions in Tass's memory can be made to the Kelso Fund for the Study of Plant Diversity in the Pikes Peak Region at Colorado College, PO Box 1117, Colorado Springs, CO 80901. This fund will support student research in botany and especially, fund projects making use of the herbarium to study biodiversity.

M. Shane Heschel, Associate Professor and Associate Chair, Organismal Biology and Ecology Department, Colorado College; Robert Raguso, Professor and Chair, Department of Neurobiology and Behavior, Cornell University; Jill S. Miller, Professor of Biology and Environmental Studies, Amherst College; Candace Galen, Professor of Biological Sciences, University of Missouri.