Michael J. Donoghue certainly exemplifies well the attributes specified for receiving the Asa Gray Award — he has assembled an “exceptional record of achievement in the areas of teaching, research and publication and professional and public service that is recognized both nationally and internationally.” Michael has been one of the premier plant systematists of the past three decades — few others have had a bigger impact on the entire field of systematics. One thing that is striking about Michael’s work is that he is consistently at the forefront of new ideas and approaches that ultimately transform our field. Furthermore, he has had an impact on so many areas: seed plant and angiosperm phylogeny, biogeography, species concepts, character evolution, phylogenetic methods, rank-free classification, paleobotany, ecology, the analysis of large data sets, and, last but not least, the phylogeny and evolution of his favorite clades: Dipsacales and especially Viburnum. He therefore very much follows in the footsteps of Asa Gray, including influential research on the eastern Asian-eastern North American floristic disjunction.

In his accomplished career, Michael has won nearly every major award in our field, including the Distinguished Fellow Award from the Botanical Society of America and the Dahlgren International Prize in Botany. He is also a member of the National Academy of Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. It is exciting to see the Asa Gray Award added to this long list of achievements.

Michael has published over 250 scientific papers and has written some of the most influential papers in the field of phylogenetics and evolution. We highlight only a few of these in the following paragraphs. His early papers coauthored with Jim Doyle remain classics (see below), but, as noted, his impact goes well beyond plant systematics to include the entire field of phylogenetics and phylogenetic theory. More recently, his work has also made a huge impression on the fields of ecology and biogeography. He has been active in movements to reconstruct the Tree of Life and to link evolution to biodiversity and conservation.

Perhaps there is no better illustration of his impact than his early phylogenetic work on seed plants. In a series of papers published with Jim Doyle, Michael revealed the power and the promise of parsimony-based phylogeny reconstruction to the plant systematics community (e.g. Doyle and Donoghue 1986; Donoghue and Doyle 1989). As parsimony methods were being accepted by the plant systematics community, Michael continued to tackle other conceptual issues, such as the importance of using fossils in phylogenetic analyses (e.g. Donoghue et al. 1989) and a phylogenetic interpretation of species (Donoghue 1985; de Queiroz and Donoghue 1988; Baum and Donoghue 1995).

Michael has always been a pioneer and an innovator. He was an early proponent of the important link between phylogeny and ecology (Ackerly and Donoghue 1995), with the fruit of this early research now apparent in the developing and vibrant field of community phylogenetics (stimulated especially by Webb et al. 2002). Michael’s longstanding collaboration with Mike Sanderson resulted in significant analyses of