People, Plants, and Progress: Director's Lecture Series

Lectures are free, take place in the Hunnewell Building, and are open to Arboretum members only (see more on membership on page 17 or at **arboretum.harvard.edu/support/membership**).

JANUARY 22, 7:00–8:30PM Replaying Life's Tape Through the Lens of Plants

William (Ned) Friedman, PhD, Arnold Arboretum Director and Arnold Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology, Harvard University

What can the history of photosynthetic life tell us of the human condition? Are we an absolutely inevitable consequence of several billion years of evolution? Or, should we be awed by the sheer improbability of being? Professor Friedman will discuss how just a few tweaks to the evolutionary history of plants might ultimately have precluded human life from evolving on Earth—and whether such tweaks could occur upon replaying life's tape.

FEBRUARY 26, 7:00–8:30PM A Field for Women's Work

Dava Sobel, Author & Science Reporter

In the late nineteenth century, botany was the science generally deemed acceptable for a woman to pursue. At the Harvard College Observatory, however, women attracted international attention as they created a taxonomy for the stars and found a way to measure distances across space. Dava Sobel, author of *The Glass Universe*, *Galileo's Daughter*, and *Longitude*, will speak about the women of the Observatory, their careers devoted to the heavens, and their passions encompassing plants and all things natural.

MARCH 26, 7:00–8:15PM The Fingerprints of Sea Level Change in a Warming World

Jerry X. Mitrovica, PhD, Frank B. Baird, Jr. Professor of Science, Harvard University

Sea level changes are a particularly dramatic consequence of global warming and estimates for sea level rise are routinely reported in the media. However, such estimates obscure the fact that observed sea level changes vary dramatically around the globe. Join us to learn the sources of this variability and focus on the unique patterns—or fingerprints—of sea level change that follow the melting of ice sheets and glaciers.

APRIL 30, 7:00–8:30PM When Darwin Met Thoreau

Randall Fuller, Herman Melville Distinguished Professor of American Literature, University of Kansas

On January 1, 1860, Henry David Thoreau learned about a new work of science entitled *On the Origin of Species*. Within a month, he had begun to incorporate Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection into his understanding of nature. In this talk, explore Thoreau's deep engagement with what remains one of the most important concepts of the nineteenth century.