

Letter from the Chairman of the East Africa Natural History

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Letter from the Chairman of the East Africa Natural History

The world has, it seems, finally woken up to the importance of biodiversity. A major international convention has been drafted, negotiated and brought into effect; politicians around the globe have made stirring pronouncements on the subject; and from the corridors of academia and conservation emerges a ticker-tape like stream of biodiversity books, briefings, papers and proposals.

Surrounded by this activity, the East Africa Natural History Society could be forgiven for feeling a little like Moliere's bourgeois gentleman when he discovered that, rather than just talking, he had been speaking *prose* all his life. Natural history.— 'the study of animals and plants in the wild state', to give a dictionary definition — must be the foundation of all our understanding of biodiversity. The EANHS has been publishing continuously in this field for eighty-five years, ever since the first volume of its journal rolled off the presses in 1910. It is fair to say that much of our knowledge of biodiversity in East Africa is based on the work carried out by the Society's members over many years.

An increasing amount of excellent biodiversity research is now being carried out in the region. Unfortunately, the results often appear in journals that have never graced an East African bookshelf, or (worse still) in obscure unpublished reports. Evidently there is a real need for a regular, accessible, publication that deals with regional biodiversity. After much discussion and preparation, the Society's journal has been redesigned to meet this need more effectively. The result is the *Journal of East African Natural History*, which will be published jointly by the EANHS and the National Museums of Kenya. The name has changed, the format is revamped, and a larger editorial board represents the interests and expertise of both institutions. However, the subject matter (the natural history of the region, very broadly interpreted), the volume numbers and the commitment to high standards of science and production continue just as before.

The National Museums of Kenya, which has become a regional centre for biodiversity work, is itself the Society's offspring. This collaboration sees the two strands of natural history research—amateur and professional—combining to form a stronger and more useful weave. Satisfying though this is, we will have real cause to be pleased if the new journal can make a tangible contribution to our long-term goal—the conservation of biodiversity in eastern Africa. I wish the editors every success in this task.

Leon Bennun

Chairman, East Africa Natural History Society