

NEWS AND COMMENTS

"Unity and Diversity in Ethnobiology"

Society of Ethnobiology
20th Anniversary Conference
March 26-29, 1997
at the
Department of Anthropology
University of Georgia, Athens, GA

CONTACT:

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Registration: \$60 (\$70 after February 14, 1997)

Student registration: \$45 (\$55 after February 14, 1997)

Send for information about rates for Native American participants and Latin American students.

Papers: Abstracts must be received by January 15, 1997. Individual presentations and symposium proposals are encouraged on all interdisciplinary research that explores past or present relationships between humans and living organisms. The primary author or presenter must be a member of the Society of Ethnobiology. All attending authors must register for the conference. Papers are limited to 15 minutes.

Wednesday, March 26: Board of Trustees and Editorial Board Meetings; Evening: Welcome reception and registration at the Museum of Natural History

Thursday, March 27: Oral and poster sessions; Plenary Session; Reception

Friday, March 28: Oral and poster sessions; Business Meeting; Evening: Banquet (\$26), awards and entertainment

Saturday, March 29: All Day Field Trips: Ocmulgee National Monument (\$26, includes lunch) or Tallulah Gorge State Park (\$26, includes lunch)

Make checks or money order payable to Ethnobiology Conference and send to Ethnobiology Conference Chair, Department of Anthropology, Baldwin Hall, Room 250, Athens, GA 30602-1619 USA. Please enclose a self-addressed, *stamped* postcard, if you want acknowledgment of receipt.

Visit the Conference website at
<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu.anthro.events.ethno.htm>

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MEDICINAL PLANTS: MEDICINAL PLANTS FOR SURVIVAL

From 16 to 20 February, 1998, there will be an International Conference on Medicinal Plants Conservation, Utilization, Trade & Cultural Traditions, to be held at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore. The central theme of the conference is Medicinal Plants for Survival.

This conference seeks to bring together people from diverse disciplines who are concerned about the future of medicinal plants and are keen to forge viable forms of regional and international cooperation that will influence policies and promote strategic action. Participants will share experiences, approaches and strategies pertaining specifically to medicinal plants, related to the following areas: (1) Conservation Action (*in situ* & *ex situ*); (2) Databases; (3) National Conservation Policies; (4) Community oriented applications in context of Primary Health Care; (5) Domestication & Cultivation; (6) Trade & Small Enterprise Development; (7) Contributions of Indigenous Knowledge Systems; and (8) Traditional Knowledge & Resource Rights. The conference will bring to bear a new level of analysis and an immediate action program following the conference.

The expected outcomes of the conference are: (1) Guidelines for design of national and global medicinal plant conservation politics and action strategies; (2) Initiatives for global and regional networking of medicinal plant conservation efforts; (3) Initiatives for global and regional co-operation amongst medicinal plant-based efforts related to primary health care, databases, enterprises, cultivation, indigenous knowledge systems, and traditional knowledge and resource rights.

For more information, contact: Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT), No. 50, 2nd Stage, MSH Layout, Anandanagar, Bangalore-560024, India. Tel. +91.80.3336909 or 3330348, FAX +91.80.3334167, e-mail: root@frlht.ernet.in

THREATS TO THE WORLD'S BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY

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[Report on the working conference "Endangered Languages, Endangered Knowledge, Endangered Environments", held at U California at Berkeley, October 25-27, 1996. To appear in "Conference Call" column, Anthropology Newsletter, February 1997.]

On October 25-27, 1996, an international group of scholars, professionals, and activists came together at U California, Berkeley for the working conference "Endangered Languages, Endangered Knowledge, Endangered Environments". This event was the first joint meeting of experts from an array of disciplines in the social, behavioral, and biological sciences ranging from linguistics to anthropology, ethnobiology, cultural geography, economics, cognitive psychology, biology, and ecology, along with natural resource conservationists, cultural advocates, and representatives of indigenous peoples. The meeting was called to explore the complex connections between cultural and biological diversity, the interrelated causes and consequences of loss of both forms of diversity, and the role of indigenous and minority languages and of traditional knowledge in biocultural diversity maintenance and the promotion of sustainable human-environment relationships. Participants also discussed plans for integrated research, training, and action in this domain.

Diversity Loss on Earth.—In their respective fields, these various communities of researchers and activists have been calling attention to the dramatic effects of rapidly occurring global processes of socioeconomic and ecological change on the very objects of their concerns: human cultural and linguistic groups and their traditional knowledge; biological species; and the world's environments. An ever-growing body of literature on endangered languages, vanishing cultures, biodiversity loss, and ecosystems at risk is accumulating, attesting to the perceived gravity and urgency of such issues. Underlying these concerns is a common interest in the future of humanity and of life on earth. However, communication all across these fields of endeavor has been slow in developing. The conference was conceived to begin to fill this gap.

Links Between Biological and Cultural Diversity.—Conference participants first established theoretical common ground by considering notions of biological diversity and diversification, on the one hand, and linguistic and cultural diversity and diversification, on the other, and outlining analogies and discrepancies between these different manifestations of the diversity of life. They heard reports about the comparable magnitude and pace of the current extinction crises affecting biological species and human languages, and examined evidence of remarkable overlaps between global mappings of the world's areas of biological megadiversity and areas of high linguistic diversity. The possible factors accounting for these correlations were discussed in light of issues of human-environment coevolution and in terms of various ways that have been proposed by ethnobiologists and

human ecologists in which cultural diversity might enhance biodiversity or vice versa. In this perspective, the need to address the foreseeable consequences of massive disruption of such long-standing interactions was stressed, and the converse correlation between low-diversity cultural systems and low biodiversity was noted.

The notion of endemism emerged as of particular relevance in talking about both biological and linguistic diversity, from the point of view of the especially threatened status of species or languages endemic to a single region---or even worse, a single country, making them extremely vulnerable to the vagaries of national sociopolitical and economic processes. Linking the two forms of endemism, a notion of "ethnobiological endemism" was proposed, underscoring the local nature of traditional environmental knowledge and its comparable vulnerability by those same processes. Also centrally relevant to the conference's perspective was evidence concerning indigenous and local peoples' knowledge not only about natural kinds, but also about ecological relations. The need to systematically and comparatively study this ecological knowledge and how it correlates with reasoning about and action vis-a-vis the environment (as in the extraction and use of natural resources) was affirmed.

In describing the structural and functional deterioration that characterizes processes of language loss, linguists pointed to the various levels at which such processes can and do affect the maintenance of traditional environmental knowledge---from loss of biosystematic lexicon to loss of traditional stories and other forms and contexts of communication. The role of various factors of cultural change and acculturation, such as schooling and migration, were explored. Cognitive psychologists provided new evidence about processes of folkbiological knowledge devolution in societies that have moved away from direct contact with nature, although such processes were shown to be less straightforward than earlier studies had suggested.

Numerous case studies were presented on issues of language and knowledge loss and the interactions between cultural and biological diversity, spanning Africa, Asia, Oceania, and the Americas, and covering both indigenous and other local groups, such as migrants, and exemplifying a variety of linguistic stocks and of modes of subsistence, from hunting and gathering to agriculture. Several presentations also illustrated patterns of cultural and linguistic resistance and knowledge persistence, as well as efforts to revitalize languages and cultures that had gone extinct, with a special focus on maintaining or recovering and newly applying knowledge about traditional resource management practices. Finally, a set of presentations was devoted to both grassroots and international initiatives aimed at biocultural conservation, as well as to issues of indigenous land rights and traditional resource rights, that were seen as inextricably linked to the viability of local communities and their languages and cultures. Issues of common property resources were discussed in this connection. New economic models, based on a coevolutionary social and ecological framework, were proposed as the context in which humanity at the end of the millennium could strive to achieve sustainability and maintain biological and cultural diversity.

Future Directions.---While participants agreed in recognizing the interconnectedness of biological, cultural, and linguistic diversity, a shared need

was felt for better, more fine-grained ways to define and identify diversity, especially linguistic and cultural diversity. As measured in broad outline, as is traditionally done in the mapping of the languages and culture areas of the world, the two forms of diversity do not yield a good fit, although linguistic diversity is often used as a proxy for cultural diversity. Contradictory results are thus arrived at when biological diversity is cross-mapped onto one or the other. The consensus was that a much higher level of resolution, at the level of individual communities, or even subsections of communities, is required to identify cultural variation relevant to the study of biocultural diversity correlations, i.e., variation reflecting specific local adaptations; and that comparable detailed work needs to be done on linguistic variation. The crucial importance of working in close contact with other colleagues in interdisciplinary teams was stressed, as was the need for interdisciplinary teaching and training. Issues of funding for interdisciplinary research, as well as for applied work aimed at returning the results of research to local communities and at fostering grassroots biocultural conservation efforts, were also discussed. A "white paper", containing conference participants' recommendations at these various levels, is in preparation, as are one or more publications based on the conference, and an informational/educational video (in collaboration with documentary filmmaker Steve Bartz). An extensive set of background readings, prepared by the conference organizer, is also available upon request.

The conference was organized by Luisa Maffi (Institute of Cognitive Studies, U California, Berkeley), and funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the UNESCO/WWF-I/Kew Gardens "People and Plants Initiative", and UC Berkeley's Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, Office of the Deans of Letters and Sciences, and Institute of Cognitive Studies. It was sponsored by the NGO "Terralingua: Partnerships for Linguistic and Biological Diversity", and co-sponsored and hosted by UC Berkeley's Department of Integrative Biology and University and Jepson Herbaria. Participants were: Scott Atran, William Balee, Herman Batibo, Benjamin Blount, Stephen Brush, Ignacio Chapela, Greville Corbett, Alejandro de Avila, Margaret Florey, David Harmon, Jane Hill, Leanne Hinton, Eugene Hunn, Dominique Irvine, Willett Kempton, Manuel Lizarralde, Ian Saem Majnep, L. Frank Manriquez, Gary Martin, Douglas Medin, Katharine Milton, Brent Mishler, Felipe Molina, Denny Moore, Gary Nabhan, James Nations, Johanna Nichols, Richard Norgaard, Christine Padoch, Andrew Pawley, Mark Poffenberger, Darrell Posey, Eric Smith, D. Michael Warren, Stanford Zent. The participant's affiliations, biographical sketches, and conference abstracts, as well as other information about the conference, can be found at the following two WWWsites:

http://ucjeps.berkeley.edu/Endangered_Lang_Conf/Endangered_Lang.html

<http://cougar.ucdavis.edu/nasiterralin/home.html>