ETHNOBIOTICA

For openers I would like to recognize the efforts of my current editorial assistant, Brian VanHoy, a graduate student in the fledgling Environmental Anthropology program at the University of Washington. Brian brings considerable computer skills to the job, as well as an interest in indigenous forest management. Once this issue is off to the printers, Brian will join me in Oaxaca for the summer. He plans to apply techniques for assessing ethnobotanical diversity described by Bernstein, Ellen, & Antaran in this issue of the *Journal of Ethnobiology*. Brian was awarded an NSF graduate fellowship this year, which he will no doubt put to good use. Brian has been working hard to master the intricacies of PageMaker so that we will be able to present nearly camera-ready copy to the production office here, with substantial savings of time and money.

I got started in the ethnobiology business on the zoological side, stimulated by my passion for birdwatching (a predilection I shared with Ralph Bulmer). I'm a latecomer to ethnobotany. However, my last two research projects – comprehensive ethnobiological accounts of Sahaptin in the Pacific Northwest and of Mixtepec Zapotec here in Oaxaca – have inclined me to the view that the botanical side of the field is the more elaborated in many, perhaps most, of the cultural settings in which we have worked. At least, this is the case among peasant agricultural peoples. In Mixtepec Zapotec, for example, I have so far recorded ca. 650 ethnobotanical taxa but only some 375 ethnozoological taxa, with vertebrates quite thinly detailed. If we calculate "Scientific Species Recognition Ratios" for plants and animals – that is, the ratio of the number of folk taxa recognized to the number of scientific species that occur in the local region – we find that the SSRR for plants is about 0.6 while that for vertebrate animals is closer to 0.3. In other words, they classify plants at twice the level of discrimination they apply to vertebrate animals. (The number of invertebrates is impossible to estimate, but would certainly yield a much lower SSRR.) Why this discrepancy in favor of plants? One obvious explanation suggests itself: peasant farmers are far more dependent on plants than animals for food, fuel, materials, and medicines, plus they have hunted out the larger fauna from the vicinity of their villages. Of course, this answer implies a strong correlation between this aspect of ethnobiological classification and techno-economic factors. I haven't performed the comparative work required to prove this hypothesis – that peasant farmers will emphasize plants over animals to a greater degree than will hunter-gatherers, forest horticulturalists, or urbanites – but it does seem that reported ethnozoological inventories for non-peasant societies are the more highly elaborated. A systematic comparison along these lines would provide an interesting test of the controversial "utilitarianist heresy" (see Brent Berlin, *Ethnobiological Classification*, Princeton University Press, 1992, pg. 3ff). One more project I haven't time at the moment to pursue.

Yours,