

ETHNOBIOTICA

Ethnobiology was interdisciplinary before being interdisciplinary became fashionable. Yet for many people, the meaning of ethnobiology remains enigmatic. From tropical forests to Arctic tundras, in the environs of the lab, archive, and field, ethnobiology in practice seems to exhibit few spatial or temporal restraints. You will find it wherever relations between people and other organisms occur and where such relations are or have been described. Ethnobiology represents a slice of the subject matter in many fields (anthropology, botany, folklore, history, linguistics, pharmacology, psychology, zoology, and so on). It's eclectic in geographic and temporal scope, but not incoherent in terms of its internal, driving forces. Those driving forces are theories and methods from diverse disciplines, and the scholars and scientists who exemplify them in their work.

There are many journals without a society, and there are some societies without a journal. Ethnobiologists are fortunate in having both. Ethnobiology also appeals to a wide public interested in issues of conservation, environment, globalization, and the plight of folks who have both intellectual and utilitarian familiarity in their daily lives with a remarkable range of plants and animals. That mass appeal, in part, bespeaks a need for more and better training of scholars in ethnobiology. Whereas knowledgeable folks and their corresponding wealth of associated habitats and species undergo increased impoverishment, as the global economy has expanded toward but not in general benefitted them, salvage ethnobiology seems to be an ineluctable trend. If ethnobiologists as a bloc lack the political clout to increase the ante on the intrinsic value of folk knowledge and its associated biological richness, they can certainly continue documenting it in prehistory, history, and the present. Someday the valuable stakes in which ethnobiology as a field has invested may be more widely known and appreciated, the subject matter of textbooks for young and older readers alike, worldwide. That education could enhance the palpable prospects of remaining cultures, languages, flora, and fauna, whatever losses in these had been sustained today.

For ethnobiological documentation to be truly excellent, ethnobiologists should seek training in whatever field their research problems demand competence. A social anthropologist is likely to know more about Crow kinship terminologies (and to know that these are fundamentally unrelated to birds) than a myrmecologist, whereas the myrmecologist will likely be more acquainted with the properties of ant venoms. If both were ethnobiologists also, each might need something from the other. The social anthropologist might need data on ant phylogenetics, and the myrmecologist on ant sting rituals. Ethnobiology is a field with a journal and a society but generally speaking it is not a discipline (with departments, Ph.D. programs, and so on), a fact of life students often do not know beforehand. Perhaps ethnobiology should stay that way. It is one field where the term "interdisciplinary" is employed in an unmistakably bona fide way. As the Journal of Ethnobiology approaches its twentieth birthday (next year), I hope you will join me in celebrating the coherent diversity of our chosen field, as amply evidenced in the material herein.

Bill