The Development of a Society:
An introduction to the special issue.

In partial response to increasing academic diversification, there has been a veritable proliferation of specialist journals available to scholars. While this trend has not always been universally welcomed, there are arguably some cases in which such a course of action is wholly justified. The foundation of the *Journal* and Society of Ethnobiology should be regarded as just such a case. My involvement with the *Journal* and Society goes back to its inception, and for the purposes of this special issue, which appears on the eve of the tenth anniversary of the first ethnobiology conference, it seems appropriate to consider anew some of the questions and issues surrounding ethnobiology which the institution of the *Journal* and the Society were partially intended to address.

After 10 years, it is still necessary to ask what is ethnobiology? Is it any more than a title or a cover term applied to various types of research which do not fit comfortably into other disciplines? Since ethnobiology has no unifying theory of its own, can it justifiably be considered as an interdisciplinary field, or would it be better to view it as a subfield of already long-established scientific realms? Finally, what common thread exists to link together the diverse researches which have appeared in this journal, or been discussed at the Ethnobiology Conferences? What is the rationale underlying the investment of time and energy in fostering the development of a conference, society and journal devoted to the integration of this research?

Ethnobiological research can be described as work that draws on both biology and anthropology to make statements about the interrelationship between living organisms and human culture, whether prehistoric, historic, or contemporary. Interest in this interrelationship is not new. Ever since anthropologists' initial emphasis on natural history, biology and anthropology have been intertwined. For example, there were the early attempts by anthropologists to classify societies on a scale of evolutionary development according to their mode of subsistence, where the appropriation of nature was regarded as a critical factor in determining the advancement of other aspects of culture. Later studies focused on the systematic relationship between a sociocultural entity and its environment, and stressed adaptation and change in ecological systems. More recently, interest in the development and spread of cultigens, domesticated animals and agricultural complexes, and their co-variation with social organization and population, have all helped to stimulate interest and research in the interrelationship between biology and anthropology.

There was a time when zoologists and botanists would be asked to contribute their expertise to the identification of biological materials derived from ethnographic and archaeological contexts without being expected to have any great insight into the research orientation as a whole. Nowadays, it is more usual for specialists to take an active role in model and hypothesis building that blends methods, concepts and models drawn from both anthropology and biology. Ethnobiological research is conducted within the constraints imposed upon it by elements of both biological and anthropological theory, and, in turn, its contributions are weighted according to the prevailing requirements and questions of these two super-disciplines.

The first Ethnobiology Conference was held in 1978 in Prescott, Arizona, and was sponsored by the Prescott Center College and organized by Steven D. Emslie. The second, in 1979, took place in Flagstaff, Arizona, and commemorated the contributions to the early development of ethnobiology of both Hargrave and Alfred F. Whiting. The proceedings of this conference were published in 1980 in the first *Journal of Ethnobiology*, under the auspices of the Center for Western Studies, a private corporation managed

by Steven Emslie and me. However, our intention in setting up the *Journal* was not simply to record the papers given at the Flagstaff conference, but also to provide a much needed forum in which articles of ethnobiological interest could be presented together. In the past, these had been scattered in specialist journals, archaeo-biological data appearing in archaeological journals, plant-human material in plant journals, and so forth, and we felt that this hampered their accessibility to all researchers in ethnobiology, and that the integration and fruitful development of the field could only take place once it was formally established in the framework of a journal.

The design we decided to use as the symbol of our newly created *Journal* was that of a split-twig figurine. The figurine, which is featured on all the covers of the *Journal*, neatly encapsulated its critical elements—for the original objects are pieces of plant material manipulated by humans to represent an animal. Split-twig figurines date to around 2000 b.c., and are found in the American Southwest. They are thought to have had some magical or religious significance for the Archaic hunter-gatherer peoples who made them.

When we chose to use the term 'ethnobiology' in the naming of the *Journal* (partly in deference to the title of the Conference), we were aware of the way in which the word breaks down into two elements, namely 'ethno'—(from the Greek 'etnos'—literally, race or peoples), referring to the human aspects of biological relationships, and 'biology', or the study of the entire range of living organisms. This seemed to render the term particularly appropriate for our purposes, since we wanted a title broad enough to cover the range of possible research orientation which relied on the integration of biology and anthropology. Perhaps this appears somewhat self-explanatory. However, 'ethnobiology' is not always defined as broadly, nor with the same general outlook as we intended here. One definition I came across recently stated that 'ethnobiology' was "a branch of the study of ethnology which relates to the distinctive physical and racial characteristics of specific ethnic groups or population isolates."

Initially, we decided to put out two issues a year, one devoted to conference papers, the other to independently submitted articles. We invited a number of scholars to serve on the board, who were known for their achievements and interest in ethnobiology, and whose diverse research objectives and accomplishments were essential if the journal was to reflect adequately and intelligently the rich variety of data and ideas which could be subsumed within ethnobiology. For the first few years, Steven Emslie and I alternated editorial and managerial responsibilities. Then in 1982, we were elected the first President and Secretary/Treasurer of the Society of Ethnobiology, which we had founded a short time before as a non-profit organization whose primary purpose was to oversee the publication of the *Journal* and the organization of the Conference. The editorial board then proceeded to find a new editor for the *Journal*, and selected Willard Van Asdall, who has done an excellent job and contributed considerably to the *Journal's* success up to the present.

Alongside the foundation and development of the Ethnobiology Conference, *Journal* and Society, there has been continued diversification and growth within the field they were designed to reflect. It is important, then, that the Society adapts to new trends, and remains sensitive to the changing needs of its membership. At the time of writing, the Society is considering a number of projects for the future, including a monograph series, converting the *Journal* from a bi-annual to a quarterly issue, and instituting prizes and awards for achievement and excellence in ethnobiological research.

The concept of the special issue was conceived by Steven Emslie and me as a periodic means to chart and evaluate the research foci of a fast developing interdisciplinary field. We decided that this would be best achieved by inviting prominent writers and workers who site themselves within the broad realm of ethnobiology to submit articles with the assessment of current and future achievements in mind. We hope this will be the first

of several such special issues which will assist in the refinement and enrichment of ethnobiology as a whole.

This special issue covers a number of important topics and issues of ongoing concern in ethnobiological research. These range from the appraisal of well-established fields in the discipline to the evaluation of new topics and models. For example, Bohrer assesses the achievements of ethnobotany, and offers some suggestions for its future. Delving into a specific category of ethnobotany, Holloway and Bryant present a thorough and critical review of the uses and applications of pollen analyses. In the field of zooarchaeology, Lyman picks up the theme of species lists and discusses their heuristic potential. Among the relatively new subdisciplines of ethnobiology, a lesser known one is ethnoentomology, and in a useful article, Posey traces its history and, at the same time, considers the value of ethnobiology as a generative source of new ideas.

Bye's discussion of the use and role of voucher specimens represents an important statement on the documentation of biological material so that it is of maximum utility both to the researcher and to later users of the data. Rea is similarly concerned with documentation and verification and he makes a number of recommendations for the more stringent and fruitful performance of archaeofaunal studies. Kuhnlein's paper brings us to another immensely important field within ethnobiology, nutritional studies. She too considers problems of method, with specific reference to the collection and chemical analysis of food samples.

Interest in subsistence and cultural ecology remains as keen as ever. Winterhalder's paper on foraging models among hunters and gatherers, and Brush's on change in farming systems through the perspective of the loss of genetic diversity, mark two of the possible directions in which subsistence studies can go. Orlove and Godoy's article on Andean highland patterns of crop and pasture management elaborates on familiar cultural ecological themes in demonstrating the complex interaction between agricultural systems and social organization.

Another area of longstanding concern in ethnobiology revolves around the labelling and classification of elements of the natural world. This has developed into an important research orientation including, at one extreme, the simple elicitation of folk plant and animal names and, at another, the exploration of the ways in which people organize and think about their surroundings. Articles by Elisabetsky and McCorkle deal with new and intriguing trends in the study of folk models and categorizations, but these are especially interesting because they represent prescriptive systems that organize both thought and action. Ellen's paper, on the other hand, provides a valuable critique of the logical and philosophical underpinnings of the process of constructing folk classifications.

The articles presented in this issue reflect only a small portion of the types of research now considered to be part of ethnobiology, as a glance at the list of contents of back issues of the *Journal* will confirm. Over the years, article have appeared on such diverse subjects as nutrition, domestication and subsistence, environmental reconstruction, folk classification, and questions of method and theory. While we initially intended the *Journal* to merely reflect the field of ethnobiology, and to encourage the kind of effective communication among scientists that we thought would be essential if ethnobiology were to become truly interdisciplinary, it has become apparent that through the selection, editing and publication processes, it has actually helped shape ethnobiology.

Ethnobiology is growing, and more scientists are prepared to identify their work as such. The simple addition of the prefix 'ethno' to a word associated with the natural sciences happens increasingly, and signals the inclusion of even more new and fruitful topics under the umbrella of ethnobiology. Perhaps this reflects a specific characteristic of scientific inquiry today, namely the division and recombination of elements from several fields. The richness and potential of blending anthropology and biology in this way will, I hope, continue to be domonstrated by ethnobiology. Already, as Bohrer tells

us, ethnobotany is beginning to capture public interest. No doubt this is true as well for other aspects of ethnobiology. Moreover, as ethnobiological objectives focus on broader issues of the integration of cultural and natural systems, as well as change, ethnobiology as a whole may be in a better position to develop theory of its own, as well as to make a richer contribution to anthropological theory than in the past.

The future of ethnobiology looks promising. Developments in techniques of data recovery, a growing body of linguistic, ethnographic, archaeological, historical and experimental data, and a better understanding of natural and cultural processes are, of course, critical. However, it is the continual creative integration of ideas and data brought into ethnobiology from many different sources that is most likely to ensure the continued growth and improvement of this newly interdisciplinary field.

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