

**TENTH ANNUAL MEETING
SOCIETY OF ETHNOBIOLOGY
5-7 MARCH 1987**

**University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida**

**CONFERENCE CHAIRPERSON:
Elizabeth S. Wing**

ABRIDGED MINUTES of BUSINESS MEETING

The business meeting took place on March 7 between 1655 and 1830 h., with President Steve Weber presiding. The meeting was open to all registrants at the conference. Reports were offered by President Weber, Secretary/Treasurer Steve Emslie, Willard Van Asdall, Editor, *Journal of Ethnobiology*, and by Conference Coordinator Jan Timbrook.

President Weber described the results of the first election of officers of the Society: Amadeo Rea (President, two-year term), Elizabeth S. Wing (Vice-President/President Elect, two-year term), Cecil H. Brown (Secretary/Treasurer, two-year term), Robert A. Bye, Jr. (Board Member, four-year term), Richard Ford (Board Member, three-year term), Paul Minnis (Board Member, two-year term). The terms of office of the above began with the announcement of their election. President Weber also asked the assembled group to approve a permanent seat on the Board of Directors comparable to that held by Past Presidents for Steve Emslie in recognition of his long and tireless service to the Society. This recommendation was unanimously accepted.

Editor Van Asdall discussed criteria used in selecting members of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Ethnobiology*. Of particular importance is that the scholarly interests of Board Members are distributed among all sub-disciplines of ethnobiology. He reported that the *Special Issue* of the journal (Vol. 6, No. 1, 1986) devoted to new directions in ethnobiology has received much attention and is a great success, so much so that another special issue along the same lines may be forthcoming in the not-so-distant future. The Editor is also considering preparation of a "guideline for papers" submitted to the journal which could be placed inside the back cover, perhaps following the example in the *Journal of Mammalogy*. He solicits ideas on the latter proposal and on other aspects of the journal's production.

Conference Coordinator Jan Timbrook reported that next year's conference (the Eleventh Annual Meeting) will be held in Mexico City, tentatively set for March 17-19, 1988, and locally organized by Robert A. Bye, Jr. The Twelfth Annual Meeting (Spring 1989), for which dates are yet to be set, will be held at the University of California, Riverside and locally organized by Kathleen Truman. Bruce Smith will organize the Thirteenth Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. some time in the Spring of 1990. Ms. Timbrook also led an open discussion concerning the possibility of providing a conference format in the future which will allow for a question-answer period after paper presentations.

***REVISED DATES FOR
SOCIETY OF ETHNOBIOLOGY
ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO***

Reception:

Evening of Wednesday, 9 March 1988

Oral Presentations:

Thursday and Friday, 10 and 11 March 1988

Poster Session:

Saturday, 12 March 1988

Please see page 238 for further details.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

MYSTERIOUS DISEASE OF NATIVE GUAMANIAN MAY HOLD KEY TO ALZHEIMERS

We tend to applaud the continued reliance by native peoples on their traditional foods and medicines as a triumph of the wisdom of tradition over self-righteous modern science. However, there is now strong evidence for serious health risks attributable to heavy consumption of a traditional staple—the seeds of the cycad, *Cycas circinalis* L.—by the Chamorro native people of Guam and nearby Rota in the Marianas Islands (by whom this plant is known as *fadang*). The disorders linked to cycad consumption are amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a progressive, fatal disorder of adults, and a related syndrome, parkinsonism-dementia (PD).

According to a report in *Science* (237:517-522, with commentary on 483-484, 31 July 1987) by P. S. Spencer et al., "Guam ALS is characterized by progressive limb weakness, spasticity, bulbar dysfunction, fasciculation, and muscle atrophy." The associated PD syndrome provides a close clinical parallel to more widespread diseases such as Huntington's chorea, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimers. Thus a solution to the mystery of Guam ALS/PD might have broad medical ramifications.

Epidemiologists have been stumped for the past 35 years by the extraordinary incidence of this set of degenerative neurological disorders among the Chamorro, for whom death rates from ALS are 50 to 100 times those of the continental U.S. Cycad seeds have long been suspect as a cause, but an early failure to link cycad ingestion to such conditions in laboratory mice diverted researchers from this trail. Spencer's recent laboratory experiments with macaques reopens the case against *C. circinalis* (and its close relative, *C. revoluta*) by showing specific neurological damage following administration of the amino acid β -N-methylamino-L-alanine (L-BMAA). This toxin is concentrated in the seeds of certain *Cycas* species and is known to persist in traditionally processed cycad seed flour.

L-BMAA is closely related to β -N-oxalylamino-L-alanine (L-BOAA), isolated as the toxic ingredient of chickling pea (*Lathyrus sativus*) responsible for lathyrism, a similar neurological disorder. Both amino acids are excitotoxic and may cause convulsions in high doses. However, the toxic effects documented here are insidious in that they may not be apparent until 20 or 30 years following consumption. Such "slow toxins" may act by greatly accelerating the normal neuronal deterioration associated with aging. Their delayed action effects makes proving their etiological role very difficult.

Since 1955 the incidence of Guam ALS-PD has declined, apparently due to post-War dietary shifts leading to a greatly diminished reliance on cycad seed flour as a staple source of food energy. An association between traditional cycad consumption and degenerative neurological disease has also been suggested for certain Japanese, Indonesian, and Australian aboriginal populations. The low incidence of this syndrome on nearby Saipan may be due to the fact that German settlers there replaced indigenous cycad forests with sugar cane early in this century. The reliance for food on the seeds of the neotropical cycad *Dioon edule* in Mexico was not remarked upon. Your News and Comments editor would be pleased to receive any informed commentary on this issue for future discussion.

COMMISSION ON ETHNOBOTANY OF THE INTERNATIONAL UNION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL SCIENCES (IUAES)

The IUAES Executive Committee and Permanent Council approved the creation of the Commission on Ethnobotany in April of 1987. The Commission has been active informally since before 1985 under the direction of S. K. Jain (A-26 Mall Avenue Colony, LUCKNOW-226-001, U. T., INDIA), retired director of the Botanical Survey of

India and National Environmental Fellow of the Government of India. To date the Commission has collaborated with the Society of Ethnobotanists to publish *A World Directory of Ethnobotanists* listing over 500 names and is preparing for publication *A Manual of Ethnobotany* based on a training course held in March, 1986. The immediate goals of the Commission are:

- 1) to take stock of the present knowledge in the discipline,
- 2) to evaluate the potential of the subject,
- 3) to decide on priority areas for research,
- 4) to promote and support research on folk medicine, subsistence foods, and agriculture,
- 5) to make comparative studies and to evaluate existing baseline data,
- 6) to investigate the bases of folk classification and nomenclature and conservation practice,
- 7) to establish links among research centers and workers,
- 8) to report periodically to the IUAES on Commission activities,
- 9) to promote the interdisciplinary role of ethnobotany, and
- 10) to promote the wider objectives of the IUAES.

Commission membership stood at 19 in November, 1986, including Society of Ethnobiology stalwarts Janice Alcorn, Brent Berlin, Richard Ford, Eugene Hunn, and Nancy Turner. Other representatives from the U.S.A. and Canada are R. F. Chandler of Dalhousie University, T. Johns of McGill University, M. D. Merlin of the University of Hawaii at Manoa, G. T. Prance of the New York Botanic Garden, and R. E. Schultes of Harvard University. These commissioners would appreciate communications concerning your suggestions, activities, or plans relating to the goals listed above.

REVISED DATES FOR SOCIETY OF ETHNOBIOLOGY ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

All events for the Eleventh Annual Conference in Mexico City, Mexico are now scheduled to occur one week earlier than previously announced. The pre-conference reception will be the evening of Wednesday, 9 March 1988, followed by two full days of oral presentations (Thursday and Friday, 10 and 11 March 1988) and one full day of poster sessions (Saturday, 12 March 1988). Field trips of one day duration and of three to four days duration are planned. A detailed announcement was published in Volume 7, Number 1. That information is still valid except for the dates.

A second mailing and Call for Papers is planned. If you haven't received a copy, you can obtain one by contacting either: Dr. Robert A. Bye, Jr., Jardin Botanico, U.N.A.M., Apdo. Post. 70-614, 04510 Mexico, DF, MEXICO, or Jan Timbrook, Department of Anthropology, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 2559 Puesta del Sol Road, Santa Barbara, California 93105 USA.

ETHNOBIOLOGICAL HUMOR FROM *TUMBLEWEED'S WILD WEST*

Annie Gould of Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada, submitted these examples of "Poohawk Indian" ethnobotany for our enjoyment! The full Poohawk ethnography is available in T. K. Ryan's *Tumbleweed's Wild West*, Fawcett Gold Medal Books, New York (1986).



Ryan, T.K., 1986 *Tumbleweeds Wild West*, New York; Fawcett Gold Medal Book

Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi
FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ETHNOBIOLOGY
19-24 July, 1988, in Belém, Pará, Brazil

The First International Congress of Ethnobiology will be sponsored by the Núcleo de Etnobiologia of the MUSEU PARAENSE EMILIO GOELDI, in the Amazonian capital of Belém, Pará (Brazil), from 19 to 24 July, 1988. This preliminary notice is an invitation to all interested persons.

The six-day congress will be divided into three parts: 1. Three days devoted to specialized areas of ethnobiological research (e.g., ethnobotany, ethnoecology, ethnogeology-ethnopedology, ethnopharmacology-ethnomedicine, ethnozoology, ethno-entomology, ethnotaxonomy, etc.); 2. Two days devoted to interdisciplinary discussions arranged around geographic interests and area studies (e.g., humid tropics, savannas, mountains, steppes, etc. in South America, Central and North America, Eastern and Western Europe, Asia, India, Oceania, Northern and sub-Saharan Africa, etc.); 3. A final day is reserved presentations of applied ethnobiological projects and discussions about the potential of ethnobiological research for the improvement of world social and ecological conditions.

The organization of the congress is preliminary and suggestions are most kindly welcome. Participants in the congress may take part in as many programs as desired. Organized symposia are invited. Papers will be limited to 15 minute presentations, with 10 minutes reserved for discussion.

Special symposia will be announced in a later circular. Two key symposia are already planned: 1. "New Directions in Ethnobiology" and 2. "Applications of Ethnobiology in Conservation and Resource Management."

POST-CONGRESS: 24-29 JULY, 1988

A post-congress program will feature field excursions in the Amazon and discussions regarding ethnobiological research in Brazil and Latin America. Two special symposia are planned: 1. "Application of Folk and Indigenous Knowledge in the Conservation and Management of Amazônia" and 2. "Ethnomedicinal Research and its Application in Latin America."

For additional information, please write to: Prof. Dr. Darrell Addison Posey, Núcleo de Ethnobiologia, Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi - CNPq, Caixa Postal 399, 66.000 Belém, Pará, BRAZIL. Telephone: (091) 228-2341.

PLEASE SEND NAMES AND ADDRESSES OF OTHERS
WHO MAY BE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN THE CONGRESS.

ETHNOBOTANIST ACHIEVES POP-HERO STATUS

Anne Fadiman's piece on "Dr. [Mark] Plotkin's Jungle Pharmacy: An Ethnobotanist Goes Native for Science" in the June, 1987 *Life* magazine (Volume 10, number 6, pp. 15-17) threatens to make "ethnobotanist" a household word! According to Fadiman, Plotkin's strategy for saving the Amazonian forests (he is director of plant conservation at the World Wildlife Fund in Washington, D.C.) is to "make the jungle profitable," most notably, by ferreting out the pharmacological secrets of the Tirio shamans (of southwest Suriname). Plotkin's research identified 239 species of plants used by the Tirio for "hallucinogens, aphrodisiacs and medicines." Plotkin remarked that, "The key [to convincing shamans to part with their esoteric knowledge] was convincing them that I was truly crazy about plants . . . Talking about leaf infusions with a shaman is like talking about the Redskins with a football fanatic."

The following financial report was provided by Secretary/Treasurer Steve Emslie:

SOCIETY OF ETHNOBIOLOGY
TREASURER'S REPORT 7 MARCH 1987
DATE OF LAST REPORT: 20 MARCH 1986
FUNDS IN ACCOUNT AT LAST REPORT: \$3,694.46

INCOME SINCE LAST REPORT:

Sale of Backissues	\$1,552.00
Membership Dues	10,276.80
Author's Reprints	830.00
Sale of T-shirts	453.50
Barbara Lawrence Fund	2,660.00
Interest	455.34
TOTAL INCOME THIS REPORT	\$16,227.64

TOTAL INCOME + PREVIOUS ACCOUNT FUNDS \$19,922.10

EXPENSES SINCE LAST REPORT:

Major Expenses:

Journal Typesetting	\$4,277.00
Journal Printing	3,962.72
Journal Postage	604.95
Various Minor Expenses	1,381.18

TOTAL EXPENSES SINCE LAST REPORT \$10,225.85

TOTAL INCOME IN ACCOUNT — TOTAL EXPENSES \$9,696.25

TOTAL FUNDS IN ACCOUNT AS OF 7 MARCH 1987 \$7,587.36