



# Why Launch a New Journal?

Will McClatchey and Michael B. Thomas

## Editorial

Ethnobiology, and particularly the sub-domain of ethnobotany, has experienced a large growth in numbers of scholars, research activities, and conversion of applied research into benefits for local communities. Although there are many attractions that draw scholars to ethnobiological questions, one important characteristic of the research is that it may be conducted in developing countries without the need for large budgets or investment in scientific equipment. This means that scholars in developing countries can participate in cutting-edge research despite limited budgets.

The growth in the interest in ethnobotany has increased pressure on the currently available avenues for research publication. Existing journals such as *Economic Botany* and the *Journal of Ethnobiology* by necessity have lengthy editorial processes, publication backlogs and are experiencing rising costs associated with print journals. Ethnobotany has become a global science, however, not all scholars are able to afford the costs of participation in the global discussion. There is a fundamental need for one or more journals that present emergent topics in ethnobiology and make these available for everyone. *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* (ISSN 1547-3465) is being launched to address this situation, particularly that of parity in discussion between researchers with many resources and those with fewer resources. Our hope is that this publication will be one of the many new opportunities emerging to serve as a common forum of research results and dialog in the discipline of ethnobotany. The new journal is not designed to replace existing traditional print journals. Rather, it is intended to serve as a free, browsable, non-proprietary, searchable electronic publication which can be inexpensively and quickly produced and distributed via the Internet to make ethnobotanical research material available worldwide.

Recent publications have stressed cooperation among researchers (Campbell & Luckert 2002), cooperation among members of local communities (Laird 2002) and cooperation between researchers and local communities (Cunningham 2001). Open access to information that may be useful in decision-making is a common theme for successful cooperative ventures.

The primary focus of *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* is on presentation of well designed research on human interactions with plants and plant environments. Such research should be leading to the development of hypotheses and theories about patterns of these interactions AND should be used for practical benefits in local communities. Although there exist several peer reviewed publications catering to scholars studying theoretical questions and/or seeking to publish documentary research results, there are few options for those whose work is applied. Therefore, *Ethnobotany Research and Applications* is eager to publish research on ethnobotanical work that is intended to benefit local communities.

## Correspondence

Will McClatchey, Department of Botany, 3190 Maile Way, 101, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 96822, U.S.A., [mcclatch@hawaii.edu](mailto:mcclatch@hawaii.edu)

Michael B. Thomas, Centre for International Ethnomedicinal Education and Research, P.O. Box 14352 Gainesville Florida, U.S.A., [mthomas@cieer.org](mailto:mthomas@cieer.org)

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The following elements serve as guiding philosophies in the development and distribution of the journal:

- Open access to information,
- Inexpensive publication,
- Rapid peer-review and publication,
- Continuous publication of peer-reviewed research,
- Multi-media support for various data,
- Support of a plurality of perspectives and languages.

Although most ethnobiologists acknowledge that local knowledge is best understood within the context of the languages in which it was developed, there has not been a way to publish knowledge in less widely used languages while retaining the quality mark of peer-review. Of serious concern is the homogenizing effect of information technology and media globalization on languages, cultures, and scientific research. Therefore, Ethnobotany Research and Applications will support publication of peer-reviewed articles in any language although it is expected that most will be published in English or another widespread language. We understand that such articles will have a limited readership but feel it is important to address the concern of the homogenizing effect and concern for the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity.

As ethnobiological research continues its rapid growth in complexity including an applied scope, the need for more collaboration among scientists at different institutions across multiple disciplines is becoming increasingly important. Ethnobiologists are becoming increasingly reliant on the World Wide Web for supporting research endeavors. The web is increasingly utilized for purchasing scientific supplies, travel itineraries, obtaining research permits, locating research papers in on-line repositories, and for accessing databases through specialized Web or Internet sites. The web has in fact become indispensable for supporting the traditional communications within our scientific disciplines.

Consequently, a secondary goal of the new journal is to develop and offer a data repository for the ethnobiological research community, and to explore the application of UPSIDE (Universal Principle of Sharing Integral Data Expeditiously), recently reported by the National Academy of Sciences (2003). This principle decrees that authors of a paper should support their observations by quickly and freely releasing data such as DNA sequences. The idea that any person should have ready access to the data and materials needed to verify or replicate a published observation and evaluate its interpretations has recently gained strength (Marshall 2003, National Academy of Sciences 2003) but has yet to be applied to ethnobiological research (Thomas et al. 2001).

Ethnobiologists generate large amounts of ethnographic, ecological, botanical, linguistic, and other kinds of bio-cultural data. However, only a small amount of this information is usually published or made available to other re-

searchers. This is largely because few opportunities exist for publication or distribution of multi-media such as audio or video files, collections of digital photographs, or very large tables of data and ethnographic records. The Internet does not suffer from either page limits or media constraints. It therefore holds the opportunity for publication, deposition, and distribution of data that previously could not easily be presented nor shared.

In addition to developing the information technology tools that will support community standards for sharing different kinds of data and materials, we hope to develop recommendations for ways to facilitate sharing of data. The availability of such data will permit an increased number of scholars to work on comparative and collaborative ethnobiological questions. This will be particularly true for scholars working in poorly funded institutions or under other conditions where travel is prohibitive. Although it is understood that some data should not enter the public domain, it is likely that most data can and should become more widely available if ethnobiology is to develop.

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Ethnobotany Program is using computer server space provided by the Department of Botany as the first location of the on-line journal. Other institutions are encouraged to develop mirrors of the web site in different regions in order to improve access. Members of the Ethnobotany Program are volunteering time in order to prepare the initial volume of the journal and develop the internet interfaces. There are real expenses involved in development of a Journal. These include server space, salaries for programmers, copy editors, etc. Although we are pleased to be able to donate our time, we are hopeful that individuals with financial resources will see the value in this journal and generously support ongoing costs. Donations may be made through the journal web site. An accounting of donations and expenses will be prepared at the end of each year starting with the completion of volume 2 in 2004.

We sincerely hope that this journal adds to the quality of the growing discussion of human interactions with the world around us.

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