

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM PAPERS

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Holding this Symposium in England rather than in Nigeria or Cameroon is very appropriate when one considers the long involvement of Kew in the plant-life of the area. Many of the historic dried herbarium specimens collected in West Africa are carefully housed in Kew Herbarium and are still studied by staff and visiting botanists. The collections made by explorers such as Edward and Theodor Vogel formed the basis of the *Flora Nigritiana* which was prepared by J.D. Hooker and G. Bentham and published in W.J. Hooker's *Niger Flora* (1849). Further collections by Dr Henry Barth, Charles Barter, P.A. Talbot, J.M. Dalziel and others in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries enriched both Kew and the Natural History Museum (formerly the British Museum (Natural History)) in London.

Using these specimens J. Hutchinson and J.M. Dalziel eventually prepared the concise *Flora of West Tropical Africa* (2 vols. 1927-1936; revised edition in 3 vols. by R.W.J. Keay & F.N. Hepper 1954-1972) and its companion *Useful plants of West Tropical Africa* by J.M. Dalziel (1936; revised in 6 vols by H.M. Burkill 1985-2005). This was the first comprehensive flora to be completed for any part of tropical Africa. Field work by resident and visiting botanists during the twentieth century produced a wealth of preserved material which expanded Kew's collections enormously. Corresponding Herbaria were founded and curated in many centres such as the Nigerian Forest Department in Ibadan. Numerous research papers on the taxonomy of tropical African plants were published by Kew staff.

Following the Independence of Nigeria and changes in the status of Cameroon, close liaison continued between Kew and the nationals, and botanical institutes of both countries. In fact, subsequent to the agreement in 1988 between Kew and the British and Cameroon governments to restore Limbe (formerly Victoria) Botanic Garden and to create a rainforest reserve on the slopes of Mount Cameroon, there has been intense field work in the region, followed by research in Kew, Limbe and Yaoundé herbaria (see Cheek & Hepper in *Nigerian Field Society Occasional Paper No.1*, 15-19, 1994). The incentive for this Symposium was to draw together in an accessible way some of these studies and to link them with others across the Cameroon border in Nigeria. In this way the papers deal not only with the botanical aspects, but also the conservation of primates and certain insects such as dragonflies, as well as the valuable work put in by Earthwatch volunteers - most of which are published here. The Symposium was attended in the Kew Lecture Theatre by over 70 delegates. We hope that such studies will have significant results for the conservation of nature and to help maintain its biodiversity.

Bearing in mind that the members of the Nigerian Field Society have wide interests and that



the readership of *The Nigerian Field* is similarly diverse from professional biologist to amateur naturalist, as well as those concerned with the traditions and crafts of West Africa, we hope that these papers will be of general interest.

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