

Summary of the Botanical Program Development Trip

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The Botanical Training Program Development Trip took place in June 1996, and involved travel to Cameroon, Gabon and Congo. A team comprising a Forest Service botanist and an MBG consultant met with over 60 people representing more than 25 organizations involved with botanical research, natural resource management, and conservation to discuss the feasibility and design of a regional botanical training program. The team visited a number of potential training sites including the Limbe Botanical Garden in Cameroon, La Lope Reserve in Gabon, and Conkouati Reserve in Congo, and they identified several potential sources of funding for the program.

In talking with the different field projects and agencies, the team identified a number of specific botanical research and training needs which range from developing skills for planning and carrying out field expeditions, to writing professional quality reports and grant proposals. Although the team visited just three Central African countries the training program should involve participants from Zaire, CAR and perhaps Equatorial Guinea as well. As one of the primary objectives of the trip was to build support for the training program among persons whose participation in the program will be necessary, the team met with the following groups:

- National & international natural resource management, research and conservation organizations,
- Government agencies responsible for management of forest and water resources, as well as parks & reserves,
- US Embassy staff,
- Members of academic departments associated with botanical studies, and
- Forestry companies.

The team asked about the botanical needs of the organizations and botanical work that is programmed for the near future and then outlined a potential training program based on findings from the herbaria directors workshop. As a result of the above discussions the survey team was able to identify four levels of training that should be part of a regional botanical training program. The curriculum for these different training levels would be similar to that already outlined for the MBG Madagascar and Tanzania programs, however it would be tailored to Central Africa. The proposed training program would take place over a two-year period and training groups would be composed of 4-10 people to enable individualized attention, to facilitate logistics, and to ensure that appropriate employment opportunities can be found for the trainees.

Description of Training Levels.

- **Local Collectors and Eco-Guides** would work with conservation projects and other field-based projects. They would receive training in collecting plant specimens, taking field notes, and interviewing their fellow villagers about plant uses.
- **Herbarium Technicians**, working for herbaria in the Central African region, would learn basic plant identification and taxonomic skills, as well as techniques for mounting and filing specimens, and for using an herbarium database.
- **Field Botanists and Botanical Inventory Specialists** would learn skills in plant systematics, identification techniques, and planning botanical expeditions.
- **Herbarium Managers** would be given training to update and expand their skills in budgeting, work planning, report- and grant-writing, as well as protocol for exchange of botanical specimens and data.