

SOCIETY FOR CONSERVATION BIOLOGY

Africa section

Report of section activities for 2019

SCB Executive Office
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*SCB's Mission is to Advance the Science and Practice of Conserving
Earth's Biological Diversity*



Executive Summary

As part of its effort to ensure accountability and transparency, the section board presents this annual report of SCB Africa section activities in 2019.

Year 2019 was a challenging one for SCB, and specifically for Africa section during which we had some significant changes in board leadership which was followed by a review of the section's operational plan for 2019-2021, aligned with SCB's five strategic plans.

Despite these challenges, the year in view also provided opportunities that resulted in astounding accomplishment for the section. This year, Africa section organized a business meeting at the 29th International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, increased the number of representation on the editorial team of SCB journals, published the 14th volume of African Conservation Telegraph (ACT) newsletter, built momentum for creating new SCB chapters in Africa, appointed members to represent the section in important committees of the society including the global conference committee, policy committee, and equity, inclusion and diversity (EID) committee, and also appointed its own student representative to the section board. The biggest achievement of the section this year has perhaps been the section's bid to bring the ICCB 2021 to Africa.

We also facilitated more interactions among members through the newly-created social media platforms, and continued to disseminate information on research grants, funded graduate education and job opportunities via the mailing list. In addition, a landmark achievement in 2019 was the publication of the first Africa-focused open-access conservation biology textbook, with support and contribution from Africa section and its members.

These achievements couldn't have been made without the selfless service and unflinching support of the section board. In addition, the section board expresses profound gratitude to the staff members of Executive Office of the society in Washington D.C., United States, all mentors in the past and ongoing e-mentoring programme, chapter presidents in Madagascar, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Cameroon, and Prof. Richard Primack and Dr. John Wilson, the authors of the African conservation biology textbook. We also thank Dr. Tuyeni Mwampamba and Dr. Benis Egoh for their significant contribution to Africa section, even after their tenure on the board has ended, Dr. Murali Pai, for his unflinching support and voluntary service for the past six years as the editor-in-chief of ACT. We are also grateful to Dr. Pierre-Michel Forget, the President of the Society for Tropical Ecology for his support and encouragements.

The year 2020 will be a very busy one for Africa section. Following the ICCB 2019, Africa will be hosting the ICCB 2021. In addition, Africa section board has identified programmes for the year 2020 that will benefit members and strengthen the section. Therefore, we need you, your support and expertise to accomplish these tasks without overburdening the section board.

This annual report describes the achievements of Africa section in 2019, and also gives an outlook on 2020 and beyond. I hope you are enlightened on SCB and SCB Africa section through this annual report and we welcome your comments and questions on past and future activities.

Happy reading.

Israel Borokini
President of the section board, SCB Africa section

SCB values

Mission

The mission of the Society for Conservation Biology is to advance the science and practice of conserving Earth's biological diversity.

Vision

The Society for Conservation Biology envisions a world where people understand, value, and conserve the diversity of life on Earth. We envision SCB, a global community of conservation professionals, as a leading scientific voice for the study and conservation of Earth's biological diversity.

Organizational Values

The Society for Conservation Biology holds these values:

- There is intrinsic value in the natural diversity of organisms, the complexity of ecological systems, and the resilience created by evolutionary processes.
- Human-caused extinctions and the destruction and loss of function of natural ecosystems are unacceptable.
- Maintaining and restoring biological diversity are individual and collective responsibilities of humans.
- Science is critical for understanding how the natural world operates and how human actions affect nature.
- Collaboration among scientists, managers, and policy-makers is vital to incorporate high-quality science into policies and management decisions affecting biological diversity.

Strategic Priorities

In service to the mission, vision, and values, the SCB Strategic Plan focuses on five priorities:

1. Facilitate the creation and dissemination of conservation science.

The highest quality scientific research and expertise needed to understand and conserve biological diversity is identified, supported and disseminated.

2. Advance the application of conservation science to management, policy and education.

Management, policy and education at local, national, regional, and global levels are directly informed with the highest quality science. The effectiveness of management actions is routinely and openly evaluated.

3. Empower Sections, Committees, Working Groups & Chapters to build local, national & international capacity.

SCB Sections, Committees, Working Groups, and Chapters grow and develop to build local, national, and international capacity worldwide for conservation of biological diversity.

4. Build organizational capacity to maintain robust & sustainable economic & business models.

SCB has the capacity necessary to sustain core operations and implement programmatic goals and objectives that advance our vision and mission.

5. Enhance services to meet current & potential member needs.

The needs of current and potential SCB members are effectively served to maximize their impact in advancing our vision and mission.



Strategic priority 1: Facilitate the creation and dissemination of conservation science

Accomplishments

In the section operational plan 2019-2021, the section board outlined programmes and activities to facilitate the creation and dissemination of conservation science by members. These programmes include creation of thematic working groups, a peer-reviewed open-access journal, completion of the Africa horizon scanning research and hosting of the 30th International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB) in 2021. At the very core of these programmes is the need to address relatively low scientific productivity in the continent.

In 2019, Africa section made some progress on this priority. Following discussions during the ICCB 2019 section business meeting and consultations with experts in scientific publication industry, we agreed to partner with SCB journals, especially the newest SCB journal, *Conservation Science & Practice*, to produce special Africa issues. With warm welcome and motivation from the Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Mark Schwartz, we have added two more handling editors to the journal's editorial team with focus on African manuscripts. This brought the number of African-focused editors on the journal to eight. However, the section board of Directors (hereafter, section board) decided to limit the special issues to one per year, starting from 2021 and matching with the ICCB 2021. Beyond this, we also partnered with *Conservation Letters*, another SCB journal, and successfully increased the number of African editors on the editorial team. These collaborative efforts replaced the original plan to establish a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

African Conservation Telegraph, ACT, the section's official newsletter continues its tradition of highlighting the biodiversity and conservation issues in Africa. In its 6th year since resuscitation, Dr. Murali Pai and his editorial team continues to work hard and produce three issues each year. The year 2019 was not different; three issues were released in May, August and December 2019, focusing on amphibians in Africa, African bats, and invasive species, respectively.

The horizon scanning research that started in 2016 is almost completed. We received over 300 responses on about 12 questions focusing on conservation challenges in Africa and suggested solutions. Since the response variables are categorical (qualitative) data, it requires meticulous effort to process each survey accurately. Interestingly, one of my undergraduate interns working on the data was inspired and realized that this study resonates with her passion. Therefore, she changed her major from biotechnology to Environmental Science. The research team is currently

analyzing the data, with the hopes of publishing its findings in a peer-reviewed journal by the end of the year 2020.

Outlook on 2020

This year promises to herald more opportunities for even greater accomplishment in this strategic priority. We look forward to working with the editorial team of *Conservation Biology* journal to provide mentoring and writing support for African members, improve the quality of their manuscripts and increase the likelihood of publishing their work in SCB journals.

As highlighted above, the research team working on the horizon scanning is making progress on this study and hopes to publish its findings in a peer-reviewed journal by the end of 2020. Furthermore, creation of thematic working groups has been postponed till ICCB 2021, allowing for more time for preparations. Also, it is more effective to create these groups when members are physically present to build a strong momentum.

It is no longer news that Africa section will host the next ICCB in 2021. This means this year will be very busy for the section and its leadership in making critical decisions and planning that will ensure the success of the meeting. The venue has been secured for the meeting, but not yet announced publicly while terms of reference and contracts are being signed. We hope to use this meeting to promote capacity building and make it affordable for all members. Therefore, we need your expert suggestions on fundraising to subsidise the costs and provide travel grants for members. In the coming months, calls will be sent out for volunteers in different committees. We encourage you to participate actively in the planning, and also attend the meeting.

Strategic priority 2: Advance the application of conservation science to management, policy and education

In 2019, the section board identified the need to address plastic pollution and its effects on biodiversity in Africa. The board plans to address this through the release of a policy paper which would be disseminated to the entire continent, to create awareness, and also sent to relevant government officials in African States. In addition, the section planned to fundraise and work with SCB chapters in Africa to create awareness in the grassroots in five African countries with the highest plastic pollution. However, this process was hampered by the need to create section policy on policy releases.

The year 2019 will go into history books as the year when the first African-focused conservation biology textbook, authored by Prof. Richard Primack and Dr. John Wilson, was

released. This textbook was published as an open-access textbook with online resources that support student-centered classroom teaching and learning. This textbook was published with support and endorsement of SCB Africa section, and we freely shared some section photos and other materials with the authors. Also, several section members contributed to different parts of the textbook. The textbook also highlighted the work of SCB Africa section in promoting and protecting biodiversity in the continent. You can visit this link to access and download a free PDF copy of the textbook: <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/1013>

During the section business meeting at the 2019 ICCB in Kuala Lumpur, members emphasized the need to harmonize the curriculum and syllabi of conservation biology courses in African universities, and provide additional teaching resources. Therefore, the original plan to create conservation curriculum and organize educators' workshop was modified to creating curriculum that will address conservation issues in different regions of Africa. The section is working with the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), New York on the programme.

Outlook on 2020

A committee was recently created, headed by the section's Education and Science Officer, Dr. Margaret Awuor Owuor, to draft the section policy on policy releases. It is hopeful that this committee will complete its work by April 2020, followed by reviews by the section board and SCB's policy committee. The draft will be shared with all members for comments and vote, and the final draft will be approved by the section board. This will pave way for advancing the plans towards releasing a policy statement on plastic pollution in Africa, and other related grassroots activities.

The section board will identify important African stakeholders who will be part of this curriculum development programme. Also, the section board and AMNH will work towards securing grants and other funding opportunities for this activity.

Strategic priority 3: Empower Sections, Committees, Working Groups & Chapters to build local, national & international capacity

Throughout 2019, the section board strived to create new chapters in Africa, especially following the section business meeting during ICCB, however, none of the efforts was completed within the year. Also, the section board sent out calls to help revive the South African chapter that has lost most of its leaders due to job changes and relocation out of the country. Unfortunately, only one member indicated interest to volunteer on the South Africa chapter leadership.

We built momentum towards starting meetings with African SCB chapters in 2020. Periodic meetings with chapter leaders in Africa is important to ensure open communication, exchange of ideas and mutual support for activities within the section.

Outlook on 2020

The idea of periodic meeting with chapter presidents in Africa was accepted, and we hope to hold a minimum of three meetings in the year. The first will hold in the first tertile of 2020. The focus of these meetings is to help chapters become more self-reliant, organize capacity building programmes, and encourage chapters to address conservation issues in their respective countries through policy statements, and grassroots activities.

Despite the inability to successfully create new chapters in Africa in 2019, we are very optimistic that new chapters will be created in 2020. We are monitoring closely and supporting ongoing efforts in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Tanzania. We have also received emails from South African members who are interested in volunteering on the chapter board.

Africa section boasts of robust membership in several countries across the continent. Therefore, the section board encourages members particularly from Liberia, South Africa, Ghana and Tanzania, among others, to step up and become more active in section activities and SCB chapters.

Strategic priority 4: Build organizational capacity to maintain robust & sustainable economic & business models

The section board took bold steps to ensure Africa section is represented in global SCB activities. For example, the section nominated members to represent Africa in SCB committee on equity, inclusion and diversity (EID), policy committee, chapters committee and conference committee. Also, Africa section has more representation in SCB working groups, including Freshwater working group where an African won the election into one of the group's leadership positions.

Moreover, we also sustained African representation on other SCB committees, including the Grants committee and Marketing committee. African representation on the Grants committee facilitated the successful nomination of an African member for an SCB award during the ICCB 2019. Dr. Tuyeni Mwampamba was awarded the Conservation Beacon award for her "outstanding and heroic accomplishments in tropical forest management and sustainability through research, global outreach, and exemplary voluntary service".

Not only is SCB chapters committee chaired by an African, other key positions in the committee are held by Africans. Also, African representation on the SCB's board of governors increased to three, with an African winning the election for the position of Board Secretary in early 2019, the first African SCB member to assume the office.

For the first time in the history of the section, the section board formally created a position for student representation in the section leadership. Alain Ngute, who was already elected to the section board assumes the office of student representative, to ensure a voice for our student members.

In addition, due to changes in the section leadership, the section board reviewed its operational plan and approved a new plan for 2019-2021 on section activities, aligned with the society's five strategic plans.

Outlook on 2020

Africa section board will continue to strive for increased representation of its members in SCB positions. These positions create opportunities for leadership experience for Africans within SCB, and ensure equity and inclusion in decision making process.

Also, the section board will intensify efforts this year to apply for funding opportunities that will be used to support members' research and travel to scientific meetings.

Strategic priority 5: Enhance services to meet current & potential member needs

The society exists because there are paying members, and members' benefits is an important factor that drives the membership of any professional society, including SCB. Therefore, Africa section makes it a priority to ensure that members are supported towards achieving their professional and career goals. According to the World Bank's report (2014), though African population comprise 17% of the world population, Africans contribute less than 1% of global scientific research. This is a heartbreaking and saddening reality. Most of us can relate to the hardships and daunting conditions under which Africans conduct research and pursue graduate education. Unlike in the developed countries, many a times, African students use personal funds for graduate education and their dissertation research, and still use personal funds to pay publication fees for their manuscripts.

This year, Africa section is tackling this problem through the e-mentoring programme to help members with their proposals, experimental designs and manuscript preparations. This is in addition to increasing the number of African handling editors for SCB journals. **Also, the Young**

Women in Conservation Biology (YWCB) group is tackling this by providing support for their members. In addition, the YWCB group has expanded the breadth of its membership and facilitated networking among its members.

The section board continues its enduring tradition of circulating news of research grants, funded graduate education and research and job opportunities to members. In addition, we also created a Facebook page and Twitter accounts to facilitate interactions among members and circulate more news.

Acknowledging the challenges members have in registering or renewing their SCB membership, the section board identified and announced suggestions solution to this, including the use of PayPal, and chapter-coordinated joint membership registrations and renewals. This will hopefully encourage members to renew their membership, and help avoid having to pay huge bank charges for international money transfers in countries with financial policy that do not permit the use of credit cards.

In addition, Africa section also organized a business meeting for the section during ICCB 2019 for members who attended the conference. This meeting was attended by over 50 people and refreshments were provided to attendees, the first time in many ICCBs. The interactive meeting was very productive with members sharing their ideas and reactions to future section activities. Many members present at the meeting also indicated interest in volunteering on future section activities.

Outlook on 2020

We hope for a better year in 2020! Africa section board will continue to identify critical capacity building needs of members and find ways to address them. This year, we are hoping to fundraise and offer 2-year free membership to struggling members, especially students. We hope that in the near future, we would hold a profitable section meeting that will generate additional funds that will be used for members' benefits.

ICCB 2021 will be a great opportunity to hold several capacity building workshops for African members and hold networking events for possible research collaborations. Therefore, the section board will identify and recommend pertinent skills to be considered for pre- or post-congress training workshops.

What can you do?

I need to stress that all section board members are holding these positions on purely voluntary basis. Some of them spend 4-5 hours/week on SCB-related matters. Therefore, section

board members can use some help to reduce the workload. Members can volunteer to support the section without necessarily serving on the section board. In the coming weeks, we will be sending out calls for volunteers to serve on the ICCB 2021 planning subcommittees. We hope we can rely on your support and service to ensure the success of the second ICCB in Africa.

Equally important, we want members to share ideas for pertinent virtual or physical capacity building events that we can organize. Also, many of our members are highly resourceful and we encourage members to share funding opportunities that the section can apply to support section activities.

References cited

World Bank (2014). A decade of development in sub-Saharan African science, technology, engineering and mathematics research (English). Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/237371468204551128/A-decade-of-development-in-sub-Saharan-African-science-technology-engineering-and-mathematics-research>

Appendix 1

Board of Directors, SCB Africa section 2020

President: Israel Borokini [tbisrael@gmail.com]

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Member-at-large #1 & YWCB Director: Janette Wallis [wallis@africanprimates.net]

Member-at-large #2 & EID officer: vacant

Member-at-large #3 & Student representative: Alain Senghor Ngute
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We would love to connect with or hear from you!



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