

**Visit by Their Imperial Majesties, the Emperor and Empress of Japan
to the Linnean Society of London**
**Introductory speech given on 29th May, 2007, by the
President of the Linnean Society of London, Prof. David F Cutler**

Your Imperial Majesties, Your Excellency the Ambassador, members of the Imperial suite, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour for me to welcome you to this momentous event in the year in which people from all round the world are celebrating the Tercentenary of the birth of Linnaeus, his extraordinary achievements and his legacy. This meeting, at which Your Majesty, an Honorary Member of the Linnean Society of London, is to speak, is a landmark in the history of the Society.

The Linnean Society is very privileged to have such a longstanding connection with the Imperial family. His Imperial Majesty's father was elected an Honorary Member of the Society in 1931, so there is now a continuous record extending over 75 years of having the Emperor of Japan as a leading Member in our Fellowship.

Looking back can be both enjoyable and instructive; we are inspired by the life and work of Linnaeus, and value those who have safeguarded his collections and writings. When launching the celebrations for this momentous year, I drew attention to the fact that this Society whilst celebrating its heritage also looks firmly to the future! The study of natural history in all its breadth, and particularly with the use of modern techniques, is at the heart of this modern Society. Scientific meetings are at the centre of our activities. Your Majesty, it is, therefore, particularly appropriate that you, as an expert on fishes and with your broad and deep understanding of the issues facing biology in the modern world, should be here today, to give a leading talk, and to conduct discussions with fellow biologists.

The Society has now secured its future in these rooms, and is able to give its full attention to the important work of providing a living forum for areas of its particular interest in biology. Our aims are to inspire, sustain, and develop openings for the enthusiasm of biologists of present and future generations so that they can carry on this vital work. These aims are achieved in part by our extensive programme of

meetings and by sponsoring research, but also through the excellence of the Society's scientific publications. As His Majesty will know the Linnean Society has a very active publishing operation which produces monthly issues of the Journals of Biology, Botany and Zoology. There is an exciting new development in which all the Society's past journals are being digitised. By the end of this year it will be possible to see on the web everything that has been written in the Society's journals since 1798.

For nearly two hundred years people could consult Linnaeus' collections of specimens that are safeguarded here only by visiting the rooms of the Society in person; consequently relatively few have been able to do so. Now all that will change. We are near the completion of a major digitisation project, funded in a large part by the generosity of the Lisbet Rausing Charitable Fund, and by the Society itself; in fact all we need now to complete the project is funding for the fishes and shells. This will mean that images of specimens and correspondence including many of the letters which were sent to Linnaeus in the eighteenth century, among other things, will be freely available on the web to students round the world.

Another example of the application of modern technology to the Linnaean legacy is the Linnaeus Link project. Now based at the Linnean Society this project will produce a union catalogue of material relating to Linnaeus held in libraries all over Europe.

The Society is also delighted that the Tercentenary year marks the culmination of a project to typify all the plants named by Linnaeus. This great work of scholarship, the book '*Order out of Chaos*' by Dr Charlie Jarvis, was published last week on the tercentenary of the actual birthday of Linnaeus, the 23rd May. It was over 25 years in the making and involved a dedicated team of people.

Representatives of those responsible for these projects and important conservation work are with us today and will be delighted to show Your Majesties some of their results when you view the displays in the library at the end of this session.

It is now my great pleasure to invite His Imperial Majesty to address this meeting of the Linnean Society of London.