

A new Strategic Plan for the Linnean Society of London

Sandra Knapp¹, Botanical Secretary, on behalf of the Council of the Linnean Society of London

¹ Department of Botany, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD, United Kingdom (s.knapp@nhm.ac.uk)

Background

The Linnean Society of London has a long history as the oldest learned society dedicated to natural history in the world, and depends upon its Fellows for the furtherance of its aims. In late 2006 as the Tercentenary celebrations approached, the President and Council felt that we, as a Society, needed to begin to think about where we went after 2007. To this end a meeting for all interested Council members was held in Winchester to “brainstorm” for ideas. Subsequently smaller working groups were formed to address particular areas of the Society’s work, and over the Tercentenary Year, meetings were held to distil down and focus the way ahead. The result was approved by Council in March 2008, presented in outline at the Anniversary Meeting on 23 May 2008, and is presented in full here.

As Fellows, you will recognise some things we are already doing, like publishing our journals and holding meetings, but there are also some new activities and directions. We must recognise that we do some things well, but that we can always improve upon success. The Strategy groups also felt that as the climate (both intellectual and physical) around us changes, we must involve ourselves in some new types of activities in order to retain our position and influence.

The President and Council welcome any suggestions for moving these strands of work and specific activities forward, and we hope that Fellows will become even more actively involved in the future of the Society with this new Strategic Plan. This is not a Plan for just the Council and Officers, but a Plan for all of us. To facilitate involvement, members of Council (and others) and Staff have volunteered to be points of contact for those Fellows who want to help move the Society forward. There may be obvious activities left out, ideas about how to implement some of these activities, willingness to participate in Committees or planning – you name it, it will be welcome!

Priority activities for 2008-2012

1. Be an inspiration for the scientific study of natural history

- a) Arrange and hold scientific meetings (Contacts: Vaughan Southgate, v.southgate714@btinternet.com; Victoria Smith, victoria@linnean.org)
 - Establish capacity to make and post webcasts of lectures held at the Society
 - Improve facilities in Library for overspill for popular events
 - Develop an annual meeting for PhD students with a prize for best lecture/poster
 - Hold at least one meeting on a “hot topic” at short notice
 - Arrange one weekend activity/field trip each year with leaders from Fellowship

- b) Publish peer-reviewed journals and books Contacts: John Edmondson, a.books@mac.com; Leonie Berwick, leonie@linnean.org)
 - Complete web-availability of all legacy journal copy
 - Review the function of the Linnean
 - Work with Wiley-Blackwell to improve the standing of all three journals
 - Formalize a long-term plan for digital continuity of all publications
 - Explore with Wiley-Blackwell the establishment of an on-line Code-compliant journal for the publication of new taxa in botany

- c) Award prizes, grants and medals (Contacts: Sandy Knapp, s.knapp@nhm.ac.uk; Priya Nithianandian, priya@linnean.org)
 - Review methodologies and criteria for all Society awards
 - Improve nomination procedures for medals (concomitantly also for Council and Officers)
 - Publish web based reports of successful projects and track progress
 - Explore the feasibility of establishing a prize for school natural history societies (Attenborough Prize?)

- d) Establish a targeted educational programme (Contacts: George McGavin, info@georgemcgavin.co.uk; Alastair Land, wmal@wincoll.ac.uk; Leonie Berwick, leonie@linnean.org)
 - Put in place a 6th form lecture programme
 - Undertake market research on the Society’s niche in education provision at younger levels, to establish where we want to be
 - Employ a short-term dedicated education professional to drive programme forward
 - Trial one event for younger age group (e.g., GCSE)
 - Produce podcasts of key Society events for younger audiences

2. Be an informed, independent voice in matters relating to natural history

- a) Raise public awareness of issues in natural history (Contacts: Richard Bateman, r.bateman@kew.org; Sandy Knapp, s.knapp@nhm.ac.uk; Ruth Temple, ruth@linnean.org)
 - Develop concepts and mechanisms to engage Fellows in widening interest in natural history
 - Work with like-minded organisations to develop a coherent view of issues

- b) Raise government awareness of issues in natural history (Contacts: Andrew Brown, brownae@talk21.com; Richard Bateman, r.bateman@kew.org; Ruth Temple, ruth@linnean.org)
 - Decide on Linnean Society's level of political activity! (NB: a strategically significant decision, but not really an activity or process)
 - Identify what we want to achieve through linking with government (policy-related priorities)
 - Establish a roster of Fellow availability for engagement with government ("expert witnesses")

- c) Maintain successful relationships with the press and media (Contacts: Sandy Knapp, s.knapp@nhm.ac.uk; Kate Longhurst, kate@linnean.org)
 - Further develop marketing of the Society (build on Tercentenary)
 - Prepare press releases for key Society activities over the year (develop a planned, rolling, agreed programme)
 - Develop and use the Society's expertise in its Fellows (i.e., roster of "expert witnesses")
 - Establish a mechanism to quickly develop meetings on "hot topics"

3. Be a forum for our Fellows and others interested in natural history

- a) Provide an outlet for Fellows' expertise and interests (Contacts: David Cutler, plantsong@yahoo.co.uk; Ben Sherwood, ben@linnean.org)
 - Undertake survey of Fellow's expertise and interests
 - Establish Fellow's portal on Society website
 - Advertise advantages of Fellowship more clearly to current and prospective Fellows

- b) Link our Fellowship in common causes (Contacts: David Cutler, plantsong@yahoo.co.uk; Lynda Brooks, lynda@linnean.org)
 - Establish mechanism for Fellows to propose meetings on topics of mutual interest
 - Arrange one weekend activity/field trip with leaders from Fellowship
 - Organise at least two meetings outside London

- c) Provide relevant support for other individuals and societies interested in the study of natural history (Contacts: David Cutler, plantsong@yahoo.co.uk; Ruth Temple, ruth@linnean.org)
- Compile a list of other organizations with interests in natural history
 - Convene a meeting to begin a dialogue with these societies

4. Be a centre for facilitating the study for natural history

- a) Maintain our collections and library to the highest possible standards (Contacts: Susan Gove, sgove@sgul.ac.uk, Lynda Brooks, lynda@linnean.org)
- Enhance membership of the Collections Committee to include relevant expertise relating to all aspects of maintaining the collections
 - Develop a dedicated archive centre for the secure and temperature controlled storage of the archive collections
 - Maintain in-house conservation facilities for library, biological and artefacts collections
- b) Provide access to our collections and library for a wide audience (Contacts: Julia Hoare, julia@linnean.org; Kate Longhurst, kate@linnean.org)
- Make additional collections available on the world wide web; formalize plans to ensure digital continuity of collections
 - Introduce additional web-based services and reports
 - Actively develop website to make a portal to all Linnaean material worldwide
 - Build links with other Linnaean collection repositories
- c) Secure our premises in Burlington House for our users in the long-term (Contacts: Gren Lucas, gren@glucas.demon.co.uk; Priya Nithianandian, priya@linnean.org; Ruth Temple, ruth@linnean.org)
- Complete plans for proposed development and submit for planning permissions
 - Actively fundraise to support development plans

We are fortunate in the Linnean Society to have dedicated, interested and interesting Fellows – together we can all build on our Tercentenary success to make this Strategic Plan happen and take our Society forward. Please get involved, come by the office for a chat, send an e-mail or telephone – the Plan is challenging and exciting, but needs your help!