

# **THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ESTONIAN NATURALISTS SOCIETY IN 2008**

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## **Abstract**

The activities of the Estonian Naturalists Society in 2008 are described.

## **Introduction**

The Estonian Naturalists Society was founded already in 1853 and we were able to retain our activities through all these long and turbulent years. The ENS started to function as *Die Dorpater Naturforscher-Gesellschaft* at *Der Livländischen gemeinnützigen und ökonomischen Societät*. Now we are associated with the Estonian Academy of Sciences which means that the state finances our activities through the academy. It is true, though, that we earn a substantial part of our expenditures by carrying out different projects at diverse organisations among which the most important is surely the Centre of Environmental Investments. But the list of our partners is rather long.

We have 21 subunits who are relatively autonomous and who present only their reports at the end of a year.

In 2008 we heard 8 scientific reports during our general assemblies which took place on last Thursdays each month. These reports dealt with broad topics, beginning with the dating of buildings using the method of growth rings in trees up to the activities of our sister society – the Estonian Society of Nature Conservation. We celebrated the annual Baer Day together with the Centre for Science Studies of the Estonian University of Life Studies. And we did not forget that 200 years had passed since the birth of our first president Karl Eduard von Liphart!

Though officially we are the society for nature studies we do not turn our back on the nature conservation and during the last year we argued vehemently about the future of the Estonian forestry and nature conservation. Together with the Commission of Nature Conservation of the Estonian Academy of Sciences and the Estonian Council of Environmental NGOs we discussed the reorganisation of the Estonian forestry and principal problems of the new the Environmental Board to be created by the Ministry of Environment. Regrettably the Ministry parried all our proposals. Time will show whether our warnings were justified.

Our President of Honour Academician Hans Trass and the Ex-President Erast Parmasto together with our well-known algologist Erich Kukk celebrated their 80th birthday.

The Society has not forgotten the teachers of life sciences – we continued with the series of lectures „From natural scientists to teachers of life sciences“. In addition to that we organised presentation meetings in our subunits, conferences, seminars, conventions, camps, exhibitions etc.

### **Seminars and conferences**

The XXXI Naturalists Day “The Planet Earth – Global and Local Problems” was held in Karula National park and at Lüllemäe. On the first day of the event, several presentations were heard from the global problems of the planet Earth to the overviews of the Karula National Park, on the second day an excursion was organised in the Karula National park. The special volume “XXXI Estonian Naturalists Day. The Planet Earth – Global and Local Problems” was published. The volume dealt with the problems relating to weather and the richness of life of the planet Earth and also gave a specific overview about the surveys of climate and plant canopy of the Karula National park.

In February the Society helped to organise the opening event of the UNESCO The Planet Earth Year on February 18 in the hall of the University of Tartu. The Planet Earth Year concentrates on basic problems of the planet Earth geology, incl. climate, water and mineral resources, environmental risks, formation of natural diversity and its protection. The programme of UNESCO “The International Year of Planet Earth” was opened festively on 12-13 February in Paris, the activities will take place in 2007–2009, international culmination of it has been planned for 2009 and drawing conclusions for 2010 (<http://yearoftheplanetearth.org/>).

The Commission on plant names and botanical terminology in Estonian worked very actively supported by the Estonian Terminological Union. The library commission, the

anthropology section, the Geological Society and forestry section were elected new boards. The activity of several sections has languished or is languishing, due to insufficient monetary means and human force, the general problem of many subunits is lack of young persons willing to be members of the Society.

Large scale events carried out by subunits of the Society in 2008 were: The Spring School of Theoretical Biology “Laws in Biology” at Haanja on May 23–25, the Autumn School of Geology “Grand Theories” at Mäetaguse on October 10–12 and the 7th Baltic Teriological Conference in Pärnumaa at Lepanina on October 1-5. The topics considered were reflected in the volumes issued in connection with the event. The Jakob von Uexküll Centre organised on January 25–26 jointly with the Institute of Philosophy and Semiotics of the University of Tartu an international seminar „What’s Wrong with Nature? An Interdisciplinary Seminar Investigating Human Perceptions of Nature and Environmental Change“ and on November 8–9 “Resemblances in Nature and Culture: Theoretical and Semiotic Perspectives”. In March the anthropology section organised jointly with the Institute of History of Tallinn University and the NGO Archaeological Centre the Science Day dedicated to Karin Mark’s 86th anniversary “Physical Anthropology. Second Science Day in the Institute of History” and in October the traditional conference commemorating Juhan Aul’s anniversary was held jointly with the Centre of Physical Anthropology of the University of Tartu.

The subunits organised traditionally scientific meetings as well. Members of the botany section participated in the conference-expedition of Baltic botanists held in Daugavpils. There was a gathering of Friends of Lichen at Piusa. The Mycological Society organised two mushroom camps, in spring and in autumn, it participated at organisation of several mushroom expositions, held topical lectures on mushrooms, supervised Study Days and

Hikes. Within the framework of the Naturalists Day there was a meeting of the weather activists.

## **Projects**

The Society participated in fulfilling the projects funded by the Ministry of the Environment, the Centre of Environmental Investments, the State Nature Conservation Centre, the Centre of Forest Conservation and Renewing, the Tallinn Board of Environment, the Financial Mechanism of European Economic Area and the Financial Mechanism of Norway, the Council of Gambling Tax at the Ministry of Education and Research, the Tartu City Government, the Tartu Parish Government, the Cultural Endowment of Tartu, the Estonian University of Life Sciences, the Estonian Union of Terminology, the Union of Setomaa Parishes, the Foundation Tuuru and the NGO Läänemaa Bird Club.

The Society completed the protection organisation plan of lakes Keeri and Karijärv, it is composed of several expert opinions concerning assessment of environmental impacts and a detailed plan, as well as an expert opinion as to the need or the possibility to improve the state of eight lakes of Vooremaa landscape protection area by removing the plant cover. The Society carried out the inventory of the forests suitable to flying squirrels and radio-telemetric surveys of flying squirrels. A number of new habitats of flying squirrels were found and a proposal was made to the Ministry of Environment to take under protection 10 areas as species protection sites for flying squirrel.

The Society continued to develop the databases of observations of nature and its presentation in cooperation with the information network of biological diversity. The public database is a good and interesting study aid to schools and nature centres, which can

be used by everyone. The Society continued to monitor the diversity of Estonian biota and landscapes, embracing collection of data on flying squirrels, bats and snails; the national monitoring of water areas, as well as the education and information programme of the UNESCO The International Year of Planet Earth and the filling in the report forms of the European Union Nature Directive. The Society finalised the first stage of the catalogued herbarium of water plants consisting of 3000 pages which is ready for putting up also in Internet. In connection with reforming the Environment Department and the Forestry Act, there was an active cooperation with the Nature Protection Commission of the Academy of Sciences and the Estonian Council of Environmental NGOs.

## **Library**

As of December 31, 2008 the library of Estonian Naturalists Society had 159 794 printed items. The titles were exchanged in the reporting year with 78 institutions and organisations from 24 countries. During the year the library was visited by 202 persons, the number of visits was 902. The library has 435 registered readers, who borrowed 4066 items, of which borrowing home consisted of 1236 items and 2830 items were used in the library.

## **General meetings of the Society**

Here we present the titles of the scientific reports and other items considered at the meetings:

- Alar Läänelaid "Dating of buildings with the help of growth rings", electing of members of Presidium (January 31).

- Baer Day, speakers Erki Tammiksaar and Ivar Puura (February 28).
- Tõnu Viik "Radioactive radiation around us", discussion of reports for 2007 and approval of working plan for 2008 (March 27).
- Linda Kongo "Karl Eduard von Liphart and Estonian Naturalists Society", Juta Keevallik "Karl Eduard von Liphart – attribution specialist and collector" (April 24).
- Joint meeting of the Estonian Naturalists Society and the Nature Protection Commission of the Academy of Sciences "Science and Law in the Forest" on the topic of reform of the Forestry Act: Urmas Tartes "Introduction", Ülo Tamm "The Forestry Act in the independent Estonia", Kalev Jõgiste "Sustainable forest use and eco-systemic economy", Enn Pärt "The tree cutting volumes of the past score of years", Kaili Viilma "Protection of the forest nature", Meelis Teder "Overview on the development of timber trade", Lembit Maamets "Practice of forest economy", Rainer Kuuba "Forestry related legislation and practice", Marku Lamp "Renovations in the Forestry Act" (May 29).
- Joint meeting of the Estonian Naturalists Society and the Nature Protection Commission of the Academy of Sciences: Leelo Kukk "A couple of years in the activity of the Nature Protection Centre", Urmas Tartes "On nature protection in an ideal way", discussion on topics of reorganisation of Nature Protection Centre as suggested by Ministry of the Environment (September 25).
- Erast Parmasto "Endless self-reorganisation and postmodernist world", Erich Kukk "The ostensibly new may turn out the forgotten old" (October 30).
- Juhan Telgmaa "The doings of the Estonian Society of Nature Protection" (November 27).
- Reports of subunits of the Society about the activity in 2008 (December 18).

## Publications

In 2008, 12 pieces of printed matter and 1 Internet journal were released by the Estonian Naturalists Society. Released from print were:

- Estonian Naturalists Society Year Book Vol. 85. Researches about history of the Estonian natural sciences. 264 pp.
- Folia Cryptogamica Estonica; 44. 160 pp. (jointly with the University of Tartu).
- Protection of the *Triturus cristatus* in Estonia. 36 pp. (The Handbook of a Nature Observer; 99).
- Keerus, K., Keskpäik, R., Vaher, A. (ed.). Key texts of the environmental ethics. 93 pp. (Uexküll Centre jointly with Ethics Centre of the University of Tartu); the text also available at the address  
[http://www.eetika.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=409486/Environmentaleetika\\_v6tmetekste.pdf](http://www.eetika.ee/orb.aw/class=file/action=preview/id=409486/Environmentaleetika_v6tmetekste.pdf)
- Odonata. 64 pp. (Atlas of propagation of Estonian bugs; 3).
- Collection of the XXXI Estonian Naturalists Day „The Planet Earth – Global and Local Problems”. 116 pp.
- Resemblances in Nature and Culture: Theoretical and Semiotic Perspectives. 31 pp.
- Saar I, Suija A (eds.). XVII Symposium of the Baltic Mycologists and Lichenologists. Estonia, Saaremaa, Mändjala, September 17-21, 2008. Abstr. 40 pp.
- Laws in Biology. 107 pp. (Schola Biotheoretica; 34).
- 7<sup>th</sup> Baltic Teriological Conference. 110 pp.

- Grand Theories. 84 pp. (Schola Geologica; 4).
- Action plan for organising the protection of bats for 2005-2009. 64 pp. (Estonian game; 10).
- Action plan for the conservation management of bats 2005-2009. 70 pp. (Estonian game; 10a).
- The Siberian Flying Squirrels and its Protection in Estonia. 80 pp. (Estonian game; 11).
- Internet journal “Friend of Lichen”, no. 11, 37 pp.

### **Conclusions**

Looking back at the activity of our society in 2008 we may rest assured that it was versatile, covering many branches of the natural sciences.

We are aware that our achievements in 2009 may not be that good since the economical crisis did not leave us untouched. Yet we hope that the crisis will soon go by and the Estonian Naturalists Society will continue persistently its main activity – the research of nature and presenting the results to our people.

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