

# Building Capacity for Ecology Fund

*Professor Sir John Lawton (President), Professor Alastair Fitter (Past-President)  
and Nick Dusic (Science Policy Manager) – British Ecological Society*

In the UK, we can take the existence of scientific societies for granted. Many have long and established histories of promoting their particular science. The British Ecological Society (BES) has been supporting the ecological research community since 1913. However, many countries around the world lack strong scientific societies, particularly in ecology. The BES has created the Building Capacity for Ecology Fund to try to change this situation in Eastern Europe and Africa.

## **BCEF**

The Building Capacity for Ecology Fund is an exciting new initiative that will provide financial support to fledgling ecological societies or help to develop new ones in Eastern Europe and Africa. The Society has committed £500,000 over the next five years to the Fund. Through the Fund, the BES will provide financial assistance directly to the scientists to develop networks of ecologists to promote ecology in their country or region. The BES has also offered to provide advice to ecologists on how to organise an ecological society, if they feel it is needed.

The Fund was created in response to requests from ecologists in Eastern Europe and Africa for this kind of support. Through the success of the Society's publishing activities, it has built up sufficient financial reserves to be able to develop this initiative, which will help deliver the BES's aim of promoting ecology worldwide.

In countries where ecologists have already created an organisation to represent them, but they lack the resources to operate it effectively,

the Fund will help those societies strengthen their organisations. This could include financial assistance for them to buy office equipment, construct and maintain a website, organise meetings and hire administrative support. For countries where there is no existing organisation, ecologists could apply for funds to support meetings that would allow ecologists to interact and begin to build the network that will allow a new society to evolve.

## **Africa and Eastern Europe**

In an ideal world, we would like to foster ecological societies wherever there is a need, but we have decided to concentrate our efforts in two significant regions where we believe we can have maximum impact. Recent political events have highlighted the need for a stronger ecological science base in both Africa and Eastern Europe.

The UK's presidency of the G8, the Commission for Africa and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment all highlighted the need for stronger ecological science and active involvement of scientists in Africa to help foster sustainable development in the region. Ecology is needed to help meet many of the challenges facing Africa, such as food security and adapting to climate change.

The accession of new member states to the European Union has meant that those countries will face both opportunities and threats to their environment. Ecological science is greatly needed to inform the transformation of agricultural practices and implement new legislation. The BES is working with other European ecological societies to strengthen the European

Ecological Federation, so that ecological knowledge can be better disseminated across Europe and support the new societies that the Fund will help develop.

## **Importance of scientific societies**

The Fund will support the emergence of thriving networks of ecologists, and eventually the formation of new ecological societies that can promote education and research in ecology, much as the BES has done in the UK. We do not believe that ecology would have developed so successfully in the UK without the BES.

Ecological societies, as well as other scientific societies, provide the network within which scientists can interact, exchange ideas and influence each other. Ecological societies also promote the science and its application among policymakers, natural resource managers and the public. The lack of activities that a society can provide is a major obstacle for the development and practice of ecology in many regions.

The emergence of ecological societies in Africa and Eastern Europe will be a great boost for the science in those regions, a boost that is very timely and important due to the many environmental issues that scientists need to address in those regions. In the near future, the BES's Building Capacity for Ecology Fund will have helped ecologists create more ecological societies that will help us ensure ecology is a vibrant science throughout the world that is able to help society develop sustainably.

Further information [www.BritishEcologicalSociety.org/grants/bcef](http://www.BritishEcologicalSociety.org/grants/bcef)