



2010 Año Internacional de la Diversidad Biológica

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**REPORT ON NATIONAL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF BIODIVERSITY
COLOMBIA**

Prepared for
Instituto Alexander von Humboldt
Eugenia Ponce de Leon Chaux - Director



By **Diana Suárez Ortiz**
2010 Colombia Assistant

Sergio Andrés Llano Consuegra
Operations Manager

Luis Alberto Camargo
Executive Director - OpEPA



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Biological diversity or biodiversity directly affects human culture and hence the establishment of a society. During this month we could see evidence through history that the development of a society can not be achieved without taking into account the environment in which it will be established; in other words, society and nature must go hand to hand, because in the end it is nature that gives mankind all that it needs for its maintenance.

To start having an appropriation of the environment, to know how it works and how we use natural resources for the benefit of mankind, without altering the stability of ecosystems, is what Francisco José de Caldas called *Economic Geography*, which, in the Age of Enlightenment was understood as the domination of man over nature. However, after the Conquest period, man dominated nature in the wrong way, since he did not take into account the features and the virtues of American ecosystems, especially those who were in the tropics, because for Europeans the climate of this area did not allow for the establishment of an organized society. This is how the ecosystems began to be transformed to meet European needs, and as a consequence habitats of endemic species were reduced, leading to their extinction.

Today, when we speak of sustainable development, we include, among other aspects the balance that should exist between the social and the environmental realms, for man has realized that social development can not be separated from the environmental balance and has also understood that humans are a functional part of the ecosystems and not a separate entity from them.

IYB Academic Calendar – Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt

During this year various events related to the International Year of Biodiversity have been scheduled, in order to integrate the community and to increase awareness about diversity, its problems, causes and the challenges that are faced in mitigating the negative ecological impacts caused by man. In this second semester, the Humboldt Institute is sponsored by Ecopetrol, an organization allied with the IYB in Colombia, for the implementation of the different lectures.

The August lecture was:

Thursday August 19, 2010

The empire of nature and the empire of man: climate and politics in the Age of Enlightenment

By: Mauricio Nieto

Profile: Doctor in History of Science from the University of London. Associate professor and Graduate Director of the Department of History Universidad de los Andes. He was director of Colciencias, Professor of Universidad Nacional of Colombia.

Guest Commentator: Francisco González L de G.

Profile: Anthropologist, MSc in Geography and Philosophy - Director of the Institute for Environmental Studies (IDEADE) of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. He is a national and international consultant on issues related to planning and management of sustainable development. His research focuses on policy and environmental management systems, anthropology, geography and philosophy applied to the study of political ecology, environmental issues and sustainable development.



Francisco González – Brigitte Baptiste – Mauricio Nieto



Mauricio Nieto

Nature plays a role on the organization of society, in which climate and humans have a very close relationship. This relationship between climate and man begins to be debated with greater strength since the European exploration voyages to America.

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, in his book *General and Natural History of the Indies* (1535), says that in the torrid zone there cannot be life, let alone a civilization, given the intense heat, “*The torrid zone (which is the same equinoctial) is uninhabitable because of the excessive heat of the sun*”. Along with other authors Oviedo stated that the American continent is immature, degenerated and weak, it does not provide the necessary elements for the development and establishment of an organized society.

In the Age of Enlightenment, one of the most influential writers is the Count of Buffon (1707 - 1788), who seeks to understand the world, taking as reference the familiar places, in this case Europe, and so he begins to show similarities and differences between the Old and New World, expressing and defending his ideas that America has weakness, degeneration and cowardice. Buffon supports its claims in that it is the climate that determines the features of the new world. Therefore it cannot produce big, strong animals and on the contrary small birds, reptiles and insects can be seen, unlike the big mammals found in the Old World. An example of this, according to Buffon is that in America there are no elephants, the elephant being the American tapir, a degenerated elephant .

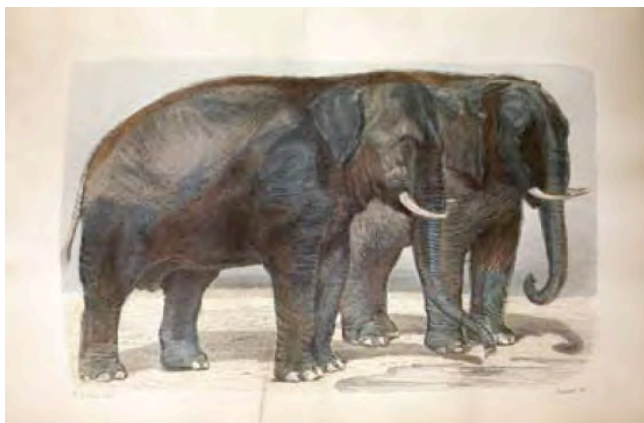


IMAGEN 16.1
Elefantes, Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Oeuvres complètes de Buffon*, V.4, p. 50.
Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Libros Raros y Manuscritos.



IMAGEN 16.2
Tapir, Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, *Oeuvres complètes de Buffon*, V.4, p. 488.
Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Libros Raros y Manuscritos.

As for humans, Buffon states the inferiority of the American man “*The savage one is docile and their reproductive organs are small, has no hair nor beard, has no desire for his female: although lighter than Europeans because of its running habits, is, however less strong; he is also less sensitive and yet more fearful and lazy. He lacks has vivacity, no activity of the soul; the corporal activity is not a voluntary movement, merely a response to need; if we take away hunger and thirst, the reason for his movement will be destroyed, and he would remain idle for whole days*”

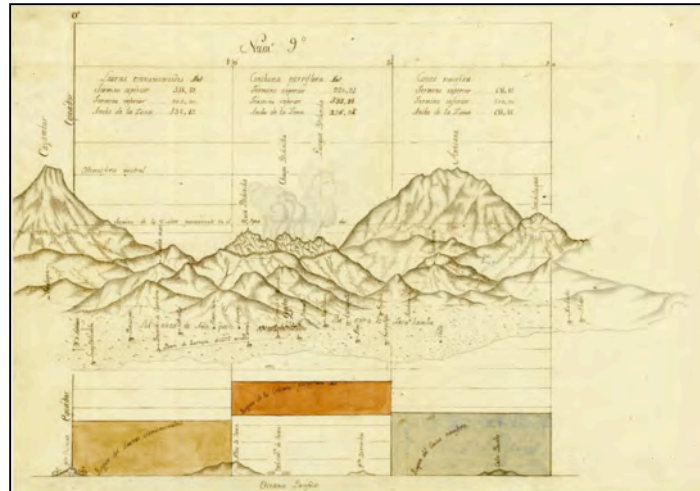
Just as Buffon does, Hegel underestimates the American continent saying: “*America has always proved impotent and continues to do so both physically and spiritually. The indigenous people, since the arrival of Europeans, have been perishing at the breath of European activity. In animals themselves you can see the same inferiority as in men. The fauna has lions, tigers, crocodiles, etc.; but these beasts, although remarkably resembling those of the Old World, are nevertheless, in every way smaller, weaker, more helpless. They say that edible animals are not in the New World as nutritious as those from the Old World. America has big cow herds; but European beef is considered*

there as a delicacy". Similarly, Hegel indicates that American history began with its discovery, being Europe the architect of this continent's history.

Alexander von Humboldt, who is considered the second discoverer of America, emphatically contradicts Hegel, who never traveled to the New World. Humboldt highlights the imposing American and how ferocious animals can be, saying "*I've seen alligators climbing up canoes and eating the Indians*". In the same way, he denies the assertions of previous authors which blamed climate for the impotence in America. On the contrary, Humboldt highlights the benefits of America stating that "*Many Europeans have exaggerated the influence of these climates on the spirit and affirming that it is impossible to support intellectual work here; but we must assert the contrary and, according to our experience, proclaim that we have never had more strength than when we watched the beauty and magnificence that nature offers here. Its greatness, infinite and new productions, as it were, electrified us, filled us with joy and made us invulnerable*".

To the *criollos* (native Americans with European parents) the most important issue was geography. Francisco José de Caldas (1808), defined geography as climate that influenced organized beings. Caldas finds a direct relationship between politics and geography, which is explicit and necessary to build any political order, saying that "*Geographical knowledge is the thermometer that measures the enlightenment, trade, agriculture and prosperity of a people. Its stupidity and barbarism is always proportionate to its ignorance on this point: Geography is the foundation of all political speculation*"

For Caldas, geography has a utilitarian sense, which serves to transform the nature into wealth, ascribing the term *Economic geography*, which expresses the man's dominion over nature for his own benefit; in other words he states that through Economic Geography one acquires the "*Extension of the country in which you want to work*". On the other hand, as he did with geography, Caldas attributed significant value to cartography by which a sense of control over the territory is achieved, because it evidences the good things the country has to offer and allows to identify and make appropriate decisions about of the most proper places for certain types of crops, navigable rivers, and location of forests, among others; Caldas puts it as follows "*It is no longer a common chart: reduced scales and everything that has an appearance of smallness and economy must disappear from the spirit of our countrymen. Two square inches must represent at least one league of land. Here we have to notice the hills, mountains, pastures, forests, lakes, swamps, valleys, rivers, their bends and speed, waterfalls ... putting these squares together will produce a superb and dignified chart of New Grenada . Here will come the politician, the judge, the philosopher, the merchant to drink light to carry out their trades ... All classes of the State will come here to take their part*"



Through mapping Caldas says that what defines climate is not latitude but altitude and in New Grenada the Andes range plays a fundamental role in the climatic features of the territory, as follows: *“These great eminences of our world, that changing our home fill us with these beautiful presents and all the comforts of life, change our temperature and climate. They are the cause and give rise to the springs and rivers: they accumulate the mist, give direction to the winds and increase or decrease the rains.”*

Finally, Francisco José de Caldas refuted Buffon's thesis blaming America's climate for Americans being weak and unable to form a culture or civilization. To Caldas, the virtue of a man depends on himself, stating that *“Climate is not the one that forms the morale of men, but opinion and education; and such is their power, that they will always succeed over latitudes, and even over the temperament of each individual ... In a word: Climate, food, nation, family, temperament, do not absolutely lead man to embrace vice or virtue, all and everywhere are free to make the choice”*.



Mauricio Nieto

Comments:

The debate about nature and society from a perspective of history has created in man the question of: How is society constructed from nature?, Arguing for this how the history of mankind is nothing else but the interaction between society and nature.

Culture is a human adaptive strategy that cannot be thought of without a natural reference, that is, culture can not be separated from the ecosystems, therefore society can not be sustained without nature. To build a culture, a society and a nation it is critical to assess what is our relationship with nature.

Before the Conquest America was totally intervened by indigenous production systems, according to European accounts. After the Conquest, ecosystems and culture were transformed, opposite to the reality of the American continent. The New World man begins to have a vision of modernity that prevents him from recognizing the essential elements that his natural environment provides, which are key to the construction of his survival; the American man perceives the environment and himself in a negative through an arrogant and contemptuous look, finding obstacles to progress and development; feeling inferior to Europe. Thus he begins to think “what does it take to be like Europe?”, “how to make its ecosystems and himself look like Europeans?”, since the reality showed by America cannot build what is required by the European reality, the great diversity of American ecosystems, mainly in the tropical zone, turns out to be the problem that prevents the establishment and development of a society.

It is not until recently that ecosystem diversity begins to be recognized as a source of progress and generation of a different culture. Nature and society are part of the same reality, a complex reality, where we are not different from each other and are connected in all the biological processes. In tropical countries like Colombia, a self knowledge has to be built with which the possibilities of the future can be defined, and not taking into account the knowledge of others, whose the reality is another one. Therefore the questions “what is left for us towards the future?” and “from where are we going to build a nation, culture, science and society?” are answered from the knowledge of the natural environment and man's relationship with it, and this knowledge begins with history.



Francisco González L de G



Events International Year of Biodiversity in Colombia

Through the International Year of Biodiversity website events organized by different entities related to biodiversity have been posted. Thus, this page has become the primary means of disseminating the activities and initiatives for the promotion and conservation of biodiversity. On the other hand, it allows for the integration of the various sectors of Colombian society to knowledge and ownership of the country's biodiversity.

During this year many events have been reported, led by the IYB partner and not partner entities in Colombia. The following table reports the events held during August.

Table No. 1. Events held during August

Entity	Information provided
Luis Ángel Arango Library	In the spirit of celebrating the IYB in Colombia, the Library organized the conference <i>Ecological structure and plant diversity in Colombian territory</i> , which discussed the concept of ecological structure from the point of view of natural resources, conservation and environmental risks, explained from natural elements, relationships and properties, considered in their levels of hierarchical organization. As for plant diversity it was examined from a phytosociological point of view, keeping a reflection on the zoning and mapping of ecosystems and landscapes in their different organizational levels.
Institute for Conservation, Sustainable Use and Animal Welfare	Theoretical and practical course environmental enrichment.
Zizua Foundation - CAR	International Mexico - Colombia Seminar, production and wildlife conservation: Report of management protocols and production of three promising species (white-tailed deer, collared peccary or zaino and agouti, lapa or borugo). Results from parallel research in Mexico and Colombia were shown, using three methods for assessing wildlife populations.
Universidad Nacional – Humboldt Institute	As part of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the International Pollinators Initiative, these organizations presented the conference <i>Conservation and management of pollinators for sustainable agriculture with an ecosystem approach</i> .