

PREFACE

The present issue of the Belgian Journal of Zoology contains the proceedings of the 9th International African Small Mammal Symposium (ASMS), held at the Sokoine University of Agriculture, Morogoro, Tanzania from 14-18 July 2003

The African Small Mammal Symposia are organised every fourth year and this meeting was the first to be held in tropical Africa. There were 114 participants from 31 countries and more than half of the attending scientists were from Africa. This, as well as the many contributions from Africa in this proceedings issue, are clear indications of the growth of the community of African small mammal scientists. The large attendance to the meeting, and the publication of these proceedings, was made possible by the much appreciated financial support from the Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR-UOS) and the European Commission (STAPLERAT-ASMS ICA4-CT-2002-50029). Together, they contributed to travel and participation fees for 49 scientists and students from Africa and Europe.

The meeting came towards the end of the EC-supported project "STAPLERAT", on the biology and management of rodent problems in staple crops in Africa. Earlier in 2003, another project "RATZOOMAN", also funded by the EC had begun to study the role of rodents as carriers of pathogens in and around growing cities in Africa. Both projects demonstrate the heavy burden placed by rodents on the food security and health of human communities in Africa. An ecologically-based approach to management, which is highly desirable, requires a thorough knowledge of the animals basic biology and ecology. Moreover, though some species in some parts of their range are considered pests, many rodents and other small mammals are valuable parts of biodiversity. The range of topics and species covered by the contributions to this issue illustrates the variety of research that is carried out.

The publication of these proceedings was a lengthy project, stalled now and then by slow communication with authors in places where access to the internet still is not that common, changing people that assisted in keeping track of all papers and the usual burden of other commitments. We appreciated very much the assistance of N. WOUTERS, V. SLUYDTS and A. VLAEMINCK in the process.

We apologise for the long delays, we thank all the authors for their patience and hope that the result is satisfying.

During the final preparations of these proceedings, we lost one of the great people in African small mammal biology. Em. Prof. dr. Walter N. VERHEYEN, from the University of Antwerp, Belgium died in December 2005 at the age of 73 years. He was a well known specialist of African rodent taxonomy and through several projects the driving force behind rodent research projects, in Tanzania and elsewhere. He was also one of the co-organisers of the first African small mammal meeting. Although he had been retired for 7 years, he continued to be active at the laboratory every day, writing papers, guiding students and colleagues and collaborating with foreign visitors who came to benefit from his knowledge. He was a mentor and friend to many of us. We dedicate these proceedings to his memory.

Herwig LEIRS, Rhodes H. MAKUNDI & Stephen DAVIS

GUEST EDITORS

We appreciated the help of the reviewers listed below that assessed and improved the papers in these proceedings and often spent considerable time correcting manuscripts and interacting with authors that were not yet so experienced in publishing scientific papers in English.

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