



Volume 19

Issue – 4, December 2022

SCB Africa Section: developing a framework for African Biodiversity Conservation

By

Israel Borokini

I had no inkling that serving the SCB Africa Section would be like wearing a lucky charm forever. I became the Section information officer in May 2015 because there was a need to augment the value of SCB membership in Africa. I searched for jobs, graduate programs, and scholarship opportunities and shared this info with the members via the Google mailing list. It still is a vital service to conservation professionals from the Section and has extended to the Section's social media platform.

I was later nominated to the position of President-Elect and eventually went on to become the Section President when I was a PhD student. For me, this leadership was an opportunity to stop dreaming and start taking actions! My mission was to transform the SCB Africa Section so it can *contribute to the development of scientific and institutional capacity for African Biodiversity Conservation, through education, communication, collaborations, and research funding*. We created a roadmap that would guide the SCB Africa Section in achieving the mission. So many members put their shoulder to the wheel to bring the Section to a position of strength that we find it presently in as I pass on the baton to Badru Mugerwa, I have enjoyed the opportunity to be an agent of transformative change for Section, in addition to making new friends and expanding my horizons in the conservation circles.

In my tenure as your president, we completed the 5th and 6th phases of the e-mentoring program, created an Education Program, started the African graduate student research grant, and recently had a successful fundraising drive as well. We also revived the YWCB award, created social media (Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), started the presidential service award, apart from hosting the ICCB 2021. Furthermore, we sponsored SCB membership, paid registration fees for 33 Africans to attend ICCB 2021, established more SCB Chapters in Africa, increasing it from one to eight,

strengthened Section-Chapter relationships, created diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) policy and Board position, and organized a DEIJ Section webinar, and facilitated the SCB Africa Section representation on the DEIJ, Conference, and Policy Committees. We re-created the Section Policy Committee (a revival of the historical COPESCO), which facilitated the publication of a policy statement on conservation issues in Nigeria. The Section also organized the first ever African Diaspora Biodiversity Symposium, bringing together important conservation stakeholders such as the USAID Africa Director, the Director of Global Leadership of the African Wildlife Foundation, Founder of Agriculture for Africa NGO, and founder of the African Renaissance and Diaspora Network, among other panelists.

The SCB Africa Section also started developing important relationships with other organizations; we signed an MoU with Ghent University, Belgium, initiated working relationship with the Africa Biodiversity Collaborative Group (ABCG), which resulted in funding for the African Diaspora Biodiversity Symposium. Also, the SCB Africa Section increased African representation on the editorial boards of SCB journals, which resulted in the publication of a special Africa issue in *Conservation Science and Practice*, we started dialogue with the SCB journals to prevent parachute science in Africa, we endorsed an African conservation biology textbook, and continued to support ACT newsletters publication. Finally, we initiated important administrative and business strategic actions such as NGO registration in Rwanda, which we hope to complete in 2023, revamped the Section's website (first time in 10 years!).

I want to appreciate the Section Board of Directors for their support, and for believing in me as the Section President. I took on the leadership of this Section during a period of turmoil within the Board. When I became the Section President, my first assignment was to restore peace within the Board and for us to see each other as friends. I also want to appreciate the staff at SCB Office, Washington DC. They have special interest in the SCB Africa Section and provided unflinching support for the Section. They are the best! Additionally, I thank all those who have served the SCB Africa Section over the years! This Section was born with the efforts of a selected group of conservation scientists and practitioners and has grown from that humble beginning because of their dogged determination, altruism, and heroic efforts! To acknowledge and appreciate their services, I spent considerable amount of time creating and archiving documents that preserve the institutional memory of their services to the SCB Africa Section because we should never forget their sacrifices and efforts! Sincere gratitude to two matriarchs, Prof. Beth Kaplin and Dr. Phoebe Bernard, whom we regard as the Section mamas. They were there from the very beginning, the creation of the SCB Africa Section and they continue to provide support to date!

Nonetheless, we did not achieve everything we set out to do. The Section has always operated and depended solely on volunteer time from Section Board members. This hindered the pace with which we could achieve the objectives in our roadmap. However, we are grateful to members who stepped up to volunteer in important

Section program leadership. This include Dr. Tsholo Lori and Dr. Abraham Ekperusi, helping us with the e-mentoring program and Policy Committee, respectively. We are also grateful for the impactful leadership and initiatives by James Munyawera in supporting the Section's social media platforms.

I am excited that I leave the SCB Africa Section in able hands of Badru Mugerwa. We stood side-by-side supporting and nurturing the SCB Africa Section for many years. We witnessed its transformation and advancement to its current state. Therefore, Badru has a wealth of leadership experience and institutional memory critical for success. I am excited for the Section leadership transition, new vision, new goals, and sustenance of existing programs. I am excited for the NGO registration that would be completed and the official launch of the community of conservation practice website under Badru's leadership. The goals of the Section are bright and clear to Badru and his leadership team, and I am sure they will continue to advance and strengthen the Section's capacity. And as my incoming successor has mentioned repeatedly, I am only stepping away from the limelight, behind the curtains where I can spend more time supporting the Section activities and providing institutional knowledge on decisions. With that said, I would also encourage everyone who can to step up and volunteer and serve the SCB Africa Section. Every act of service will make a significant impact in pushing the society forward. Thank you!

Israel Borokini is the outgoing president of the SCB Africa Section.