NAIROBI - ESEA held a seminar on Friday 24th September at the National Museums of Kenya in which Prof. John Banks from the University of Washington gave a presentation titled: Beetles, Elephants and an Afrotropical Thrush: ecological cascades in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. The presentation explored research Prof. Banks is doing at the forest that touches on issues at the interface of conservation biology and agricultural production, more specifically how populations are affected both directly and indirectly by vegetation diversity and structure, in both natural ecosystems and agro-ecosystems. Prof. Banks' study further seeks to analyse population dynamics and their effects on target & non- target organisms in agro-ecosystems.

The abstract of the study which he conducted with Colin Jackson, Lisa Hannon, Christopher Thomas, Albert Baya and Laban Njoroge read "Although studies have explored how habitat structure and disturbance affect arthropod communities, few have explicitly tested the effects of both structure and disturbance level across trophic levels and phyla. We present here the results of a study conducted in the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest (ASF) of coastal Kenya, in which abundance of arthropods and one of their avian predators, the East Coast Akalat Sheppardia gunning sokokensis was compared in relatively undisturbed habitat (outside elephant roaming areas) and in disturbed habitat (inside elephant roaming areas). Vegetation structure in both areas was measured using several metrics, including leaf litter depth, understory vegetation density, animal disturbance and fallen log counts. Leaf litter and coleopteran abundance were higher outside the elephant roaming areas, whereas understory visibility, animal disturbance and dipteran diversity were much higher inside the elephant areas. Species composition of several arthropod taxa (e.g. Hymenoptera, Coleoptera, Diptera, Hemiptera and Araneae) was also influenced by degree of disturbance, whereas akalat abundance was inversely related to understory visibility. Our results suggest that differences in species sensitivity to habitat disturbance and vegetation structure across trophic levels should be incorporated into the management and conservation of rare and endangered species." (Courtesy of Wiley Online Library)

The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is the largest single block of indigenous coastal forest remaining in East Africa. It is situated in Kenya's Coast Province and transverses Kilifi and Malindi Districts at a latitude of 3° 20' S and longitude 39° 50' E. The name of the forest emanates from the two towns that loosely demarcate its North-South extremities. The forest has three major vegetation types i.e. mixed forest, Brachystegia Forest and Cynometra Forest.

Prof. John Banks is currently a Professor of Environmental Science, Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences at the University of Washington. He obtained his doctorate in Zoology from the same in 1997 through a dissertation titled "The effects of landscape heterogeneity on insect populations: a study of pattern and scale". Prior to this he received a Masters of Science in Applied Mathematics from the University of Southern California in 1990. His undergraduate degree is a Bachelors is in Mathematics which he received from Pomona College in 1986. He is also an affiliate associate professor in the Department of Plant, Soil & Entomological Sciences at the University of Idaho, as well as being an affiliate member of the Invertebrate Section in the

Department of Zoology at the National Museums of Kenya.

Prof. Banks is a member of both the Society for Conservation Biology, the Ecological Society of America and the Ecological Society for Eastern Africa (ESEA). He has been invited to gives talks in seven different countries in South America, Europe, Asia and Africa; and has submitted material for publication in fourteen different books, reviews and reports, notwithstanding thirty peer-reviewed articles.