**AN OVERVIEW OF LICHEN DIVERSITY AND LICHENICOLOUS FUNGI IN KENYA (EAST AFRICA)**

Paul Muigai Kirika1\*; Thorsten Lumbsch2

1 Botany Department, National Museums of Kenya, P.O. Box 40658-00100, Nairobi, Kenya; 2 The Field Museum of Natural History, 1400 S. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60605, USA. \* E-mail: pmkirika@gmail.com

Kenya represent a significant part of East Africa endowed with diverse climate and vegetation types harbouring different lichen communities. At low elevation, coastal forests occur, while further inland you find savannahs interspersed with many inselbergs and montane and alpine vegetation at high elevation. Lichen exploration in Kenya started in the late 19th and early 20th century with European explorers and later by some professional botanists visiting the country and collecting lichens among plants. However, the most instrumental studies were undertaken between 1971 and 1977 by Hildur Krog and Dougal Swinscow who collected intensively in East Africa. Their collections and subsequent excursions by other lichenologists dramatically increased the knowledge of lichens in Kenyan. Further, our recent work which started in 2010 has also significantly contributed to improved knowledge of lichen diversity, with documentation of many new records for Kenya and even the entire African continent. New species level lineages in various groups of lichens including some in well-known and widely distributed species, have been detected using molecular tools. To update the current preliminary Kenya lichen checklist, we evaluated available published literature in addition to our collections. In total, 944 species belonging to 219 genera and 60 families were recorded. Parmelioid lichens are most dominant with Parmeliaceae comprising 253 species, the most speciose genera include; *Parmotrema* (66 spp.), *Usnea* (40), *Xanthoparmelia* (36) and *Hypotrachyna* (32). Other major families comprise Caliciaceae (65), Physciaceae (64), Ramalinaceae (52), Collemataceae (43) Gomphillaceae (43), Pilocarpaceae (41) Graphidaceae (38) and Porinaceae (35). Species delimitation and classification of Kenyan lichens is mainly based on the traditional morphological, anatomical and/or chemical characters which has been shown to underestimate taxa diversity. More species are expected from underexplored regions in Kenya while taxonomic reviews using molecular tools are anticipated to improve our knowledge of species diversity and biogeographic patterns.