

CITIZEN SCIENCE IN HISTORY

In the example of the trustees of the Estonian Naturalists' Society during the Soviet occupation of Estonia

Stefan Ottens, stotten1@tlu.ee
Tallinn University, RURALEX



Estonian Naturalists' Society (ENS)



Estonian Naturalists' Society (*Eesti Looduseuurijate Selts*) was founded in 1853 and over time became the biggest scientific society in Estonia and is the oldest continually operating scientific society in the Baltic States. The society was at first affiliated with the Livonian Society of Public Utility and Economy (*Liivimaa Üldkasulik ja Õkonoomiline Sotsieteet*) until 1878. After the Second World War and the consolidation of Soviet power in Estonia, the society became associated with the Estonian SSR Academy of Sciences (*Eesti NSV Teaduste Akadeemia*) in 1946. After Estonia regained its independence in 1991, the society associated itself with the Estonian Academy of Sciences in 1998. The society's main objectives throughout the times were the conductment of research in environmental sciences and the popularization of natural sciences to the general public through public events and literature, the work being made through various commissions and sections.

ENS and citizen science

Amateur environmental scientists and their association with ENS has already been documented since the 19th century, but it reaches its peak during the Soviet occupation. In the 1950s the society formally organizes these 'nature observers' with the formation of the Commission of Phenology and adopts a new member status into its charter: the trustee (*usaldusmees*). Up until this point, ENS formal membership consisted of full and honorary members, who were formally educated in natural sciences. but now any nature and environment loving person could apply as a trustee. Trustees were a diverse group of people, from carpenters to car drivers, teachers to high school students, who were united by one ideal: the love for nature. Trustee's main function was gathering phenological data and sending them to the ENS, the data would be basis for research. In addition, they would also propagate environmental values, write articles in newspapers, etc. The fields in which trustees were most active in the Estonian SSR were ornithology (study of birds), ichthyology (study of fish), and botany.

ENS would play a very big part in not only coordinating the work of trustees, but in advancing the environmental citizen science in ESSR as a whole. The most significant factors and contributions to the advancement of this phenomenon can be boiled down to two things: 1) In 1951, ENS starts to publish a series of publications oriented towards nature observers, which include handbooks on conducting field studies, and includes results of latest research works from ENS, called *Abiks loodusevaatlejale* (Handbook of a nature observer); 2) The organization of numerous public events by ENS oriented towards educating nature observers, and popularizing natural sciences to general public, i.e. national nature observers' meetings, regional seminar meetings of ENS trustees and observers, nature conservation days, etc.

Throughout the years, the number of trustees fluctuated between approx. 200-400. In 1978, the society's 125th jubilee, the ENS had 1294 members: 9 honorary, 817 full members and 430 trustees, the rest were correspondent members. Several active trustees would become full members of ENS.



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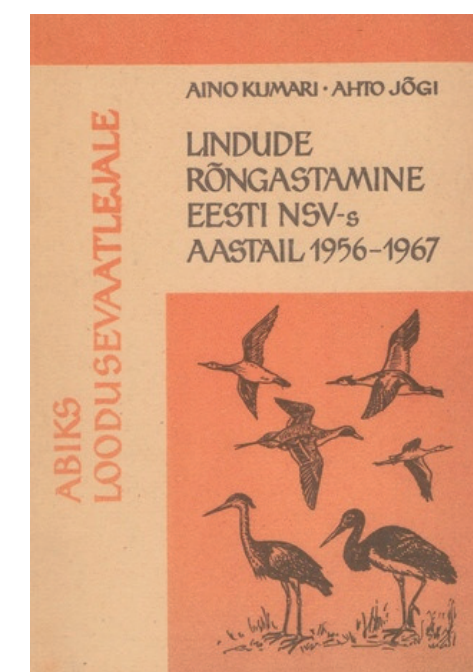
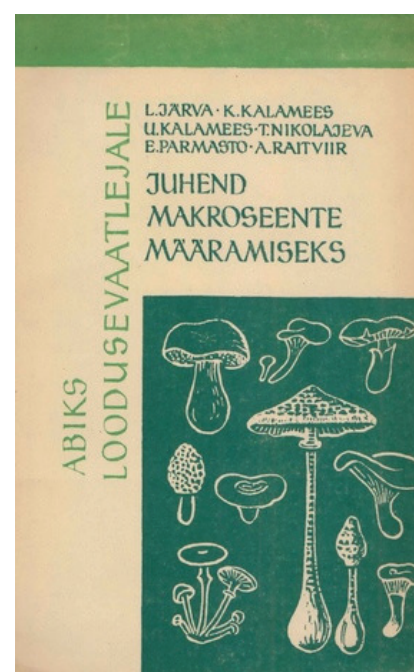


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Pictures from the II national nature observers' meeting in Kihnu island. August 1957. Source: FOTIS



Examples of *Abiks loodusevaatlejale* publications. Source: DIGAR

From left to right: *Guide to Identifying Macrofungi* (1963), *Bird Ringing in Estonian SSR 1956-1967* (1974)



Excerpts from Soviet-era newspapers of ENS trustees writing in regards to calls for participation in bird counting to the general public. Source: DIGAR

Upper: Tee Kommunismile, nr. 137, 22.11.1958
Lower: Pärnu Kommunist, nr. 110, 17.09.1964

Key sources

Linda Kongo. *Eesti Looduseuurijate Seltsi 150 tegevusaastat. 1853-2003*. Tallinn: Teaduste Akadeemia Kirjastus, 2003
V. Kaavere, U. Roosimaa (eds.). *125 aastat Eesti Looduseuurijate Seltsi*. Tartu: Eesti NSV Teaduste Akadeemia, 1978