

The future of the Society

Over the last year, the Executive Committee, with help from many members of Council, have put together the most comprehensive development plan in the Society's history. As most of you will know, despite times being difficult in terms of fund-raising, we have succeeded in maintaining our activities and profile and indeed have been slowly expanding the project portfolio within the capacity of the resources we have. Our mission is 'to safeguard the future of endangered species of animals and plants' and we are unashamedly a species-orientated society with a worldwide conservation interest. It is worth remembering that we are the world's longest serving international conservation body and in our earlier days were responsible for the foundation of a number of important national parks and played a significant role in the formation of the two foremost conservation organizations today – IUCN and WWF. Our strategic objectives, which have been clearly defined in the development plan, are:

1. To define and implement an endangered species programme that will promote, co-ordinate and carry out practical projects on species identified by the international scientific community as being under threat of extinction.
2. To implement an Africa programme, concentrating on threatened species of animals and plants in the tropical forest regions of Africa.
3. To define and implement an Asia programme of specific projects aimed at protecting species and maintaining biological diversity in the forests of the South East Asian archipelago.
4. To build a 'plants in trade' programme that continues and expands the Society's activities in this context.

There are very few conservation organizations in this country acting on a broad international basis and largely species orientated. There are even fewer that operate from a sound scientific background and base their work on a factual understanding of priority conservation needs. Much of the conservation world today depends on funding extracted

through purely emotional appeal and much of that detaches animal, plant and habitat conservation from issues of human population, sustainable development and continued grinding poverty. These factors are inseparable and conservation that does not acknowledge this will not work. It is vital, as the world's politicians and institutions slowly begin to understand the issues that we are all interested in and see them as the most important global challenge facing us today, that societies such as ours build a much greater capacity to influence important decision making in this respect and participate in the priority activities that are going to bring about changes in attitude and changes at the points where action is needed.

The Society has always been small and is very much a membership-based organization. As the members you are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of FFPS. Although we have been steadily rebuilding our reserves, they are still limited. We are able to operate as effectively as we do because we have a highly dedicated staff, who have devoted a considerable part of their lives to the success of the Society. Both they and your current Council and Officers believe that we cannot stand still. We must try to take the Society into a phase of steady growth in order to achieve the objectives we have set out for ourselves in the new plan. We have to do this if we are to have the influence that the Society deserves, so that we sit alongside the better known names in the responsible conservation community, ensuring that soundly based advice is provided to those who have to make major decisions on conservation and that they are not confused by the many different messages that come from less knowledgeable and more public-relations-orientated sources.

We cannot make this further stride without investing in more human resources because the additional work involved is beyond our current staff capacity. What we intend to do in the very near future is to take two steps in this respect. The first is to invest further in project co-ordination and development, so that the amount of work we ourselves are involved in increases, thus giving us a higher public

profile. The second step is to increase our capacity to raise resources, probably through the appointment of a chief executive with an ability to co-ordinate such activity on behalf of us all. These moves are not without risk.

We will have to dip into our reserves in order to invest in further human resources before we can expect money to come back to us to support the work. However, if we don't take this step, the Society will stand still and will not be capable of taking on the challenges that face us at the moment.

The FFPS is your Society and it is support from the membership that will ultimately decide whether it grows, stagnates or dies. Personally, I feel that to go for growth is the right option, even if that does mean using our reserves. Either we play a significant role in the coming years to we pass that role to others. We should not allow ourselves to stagnate. I would very much like to hear from members on the subject of the future of the Society.

D. M. Jones, Chairman, FFPS Council.

8th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, Kyoto, Japan, 2–13 March 1992

For some, the biennial meetings of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora have become landmarks in the progress of species conservation. Others roundly criticize CITES as expensive and unwieldy and a convenient smoke-screen for many countries and traders who wish to ignore the warning messages and carry on 'business as usual'. Indeed, for many of those anxious to promote the conservation of fast-dwindling species, the Eighth Meeting, held in Japan in March, was a highly frustrating affair.

Although the agenda was packed, nearly half the proposals to add more species to the Appendices were withdrawn and many of the resolutions to improve the workings of CITES that were adopted had been watered down significantly. None the less, the Kyoto meeting will be rightly remembered for finally bring-

ing the debate on sustainable wildlife use into sharp focus.

While, to some people, exploiting wildlife is anathema, to others it presents the only hope for conservation. Whatever aesthetic, spiritual or religious reasons one may hold for conservation of biodiversity, the sheer overwhelming fact is that as human pressures continue to grow still further, any species that does not have a pragmatic reason to exist in human eyes is likely to be wiped out, sooner or later. It is going to be a hard enough job sustainably managing those species or habitats that are valued resources.

Nevertheless, no single solution is going to provide all the answers and it would appear that the only sensible approach is to assess each and every case on its individual merits. Two such cases, which were fiercely debated in Kyoto, were the proposals to remove the bans on trade in both African elephants and black and white rhinos. Both proposals were ultimately thwarted and probably rightly so. Yet blanket trade bans are not necessarily viewed as sensible, even by some committed conservationists. The ban on ivory, accompanied by solid enforcement, is clearly beginning to help many populations of elephants, yet it is all too obvious that the ban on rhino horn has done little or nothing to help the rhinos. Trade flourishes and the future for most rhino populations is now bleaker than ever before. Some suggest that there will not even be a debate on rhino at the next CITES meeting because there will be no rhino left to discuss. Is it possible that legitimizing the trade could make it easier to control? Could it realistically in either case produce the great deal of cash required to sustain the species?

What is undoubtedly – and swiftly – needed for CITES is an updated set of criteria by which to assess the appropriateness of Appendix I (trade ban) or Appendix II (monitoring, sometimes with the imposition of quotas) listing for species. Thankfully, a process was established in Kyoto to prepare a revision of those criteria that are currently supposed to be used. However, one has to question whether any greater heed will be paid to these forthcoming guidelines than the existing set.

Probably more so than ever before, many decisions taken by the Parties in Kyoto were based more on political expediency than on any scientific or objective assessment of the situation. This was certainly the case with the important proposals to list on Appendix II the tropical timbers Brazilian mahogany *Swietenia macrophylla*, merbau *Intsia* spp. and ramin *Gonostylus bancanus*, as well as the Atlantic bluefin tuna *Thunnus thunnus*. Under severe pressure from traders these proposals were all withdrawn, thereby wasting the months of work and consultation that had gone into their preparation, not to mention any raised hopes that the monitoring that would have been required might have contributed to the species long-term prospects of survival – and with them the trades that ultimately depend on them.

There were a few successes in the Appendix II listing proposals including Cuban mahogany *Swietenia mahagoni*, lignum-vitae *Guaiacum officinale*, afrormosia *Pericopsis elata*, the Venus fly-trap *Dionaea muscipula* and several species of airplants *Tillandsia* spp., as well as all bear species that had not already been listed. A number of bird species, mostly hornbills and toucans, were also added to the Appendices, as were several species of reptiles. The Brazilian rosewood *Dalbergia nigra* was added to Appendix I. Furthermore, some species were transferred from Appendix II to Appendix I, thereby strengthening their protection. These included several genera of cacti (*Ariocarpus*, *Discocactus*, *Melocactus* and *Uebelmannia*), as well as Geoffroy's cat *Felis geoffroyi* and further bird species.

Mike Read, FFPS Botanical Consultant.

IVth World Congress on National Parks and Protected Areas, Caracas, Venezuela, 10–21 February 1992

The World Congress acts, each decade, as a reference point in the ongoing process of ensuring that representative samples of the world's natural habitats are effectively managed as protected areas for the benefit of people and nature. The previous one underscored

the importance of ensuring the relevance and involvement of local people in the management of protected areas. Since then, conservation of biodiversity and protected areas has entered the mainstream of socio-economic development, in theory and increasingly in practice. This was reflected in the subtitle: 'Parks for Life: enhancing the role of conservation in sustaining society'.

The scope of the conference was, of course, enormous. Following the keynote addresses of the opening plenaries, the themes of the four symposia were presented – How Protected Areas Meet Society's Needs, Protected Areas in a Changing World, Regional Planning and Protected Areas, and Strengthening Protected Area Management. The following 6 days were devoted to no fewer than 50 workshops, of which up to 15 were running on any given day. The effect of such a concentrated timetable was bewildering, compounded by the inevitable variability in content, chairmanship style and quality, impromptu reorganizations and occasional administrative mishaps. Although the delegates were invited as individuals, their organizational colours were never far from the surface and the usual *ad hoc* meetings, dealings and general business were being done concurrently. As the days passed, the impression of being unable to absorb the totality of the conference mounted until the end when, by an apparently mysterious process that bears witness to the behind-the-scenes work of the co-ordinating committees, the whole was pulled back together for the concluding sessions. The final plenaries, providing the last chances for special interest groups to plead specific causes in general pronouncements, hammered out the finished forms of words for the key outputs: The Caracas Declaration, the recommendations on policy issues, and the Caracas Action Plan – and the conference was concluded.

The Caracas Declaration consisted of a statement for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) – the Earth Summit – in June 1992. It re-emphasized the vital importance of protected areas and called upon governments and national and international bodies to extend and sup-

port them. The Declaration will be carried to UNCED by the President of Venezuela so that its contents can be incorporated within Agenda 21, the world environmental action plan for the twenty-first century.

Each of the workshops contributed to the formulation of the recommendations, grouped under 21 headings covering five major issues: universal; social, economic and political; scientific; regional planning; and management. They reflected the wide spread of the workshops but certain themes were recurrent, notably the need to strengthen NGO involvement, fix more firmly the role of protected areas within socio-economic planning at all levels, assure better co-operation and co-ordination, and give more attention to the interests and more effective involvement of local people.

The recommendations were pulled together in the Action Plan. The core of this document lay in the formulation of two policies, to run simultaneously: to develop further the management capacity for existing protected areas and to extend protected area coverage over all biomes and important sites of cultural heritage. The corollary was that significant increases in financial resources were required.

So, where do we now stand? The whole array of issues has been given an airing, but there is no great reorientation, simply a reaffirmation of the need to pursue with more vigour the approaches that have evolved over recent years. The fundamental problem remains obstinate; many of the finest natural areas in the world continue to lie within parks that are underfunded, poorly managed, ill-equipped, starved of resources and support, and under threat. Pressures are intensifying and new problems appearing, the most dire being that of climate change, which is set to throw all that has been done into complete disarray. On the other hand, this is now recognized by governments and major donor agencies as a serious problem, which was not the case 10 years ago. The challenge now is to make sure that it is addressed appropriately. It is certain that organizations such as the FFPS are still going to be needed in the future.

As a postscript, mention must be made of the recognition given to the conference by its

host, Venezuela. It was impeccable. At least one delegate was seriously impressed and is making every effort to get back to appreciate the country at more leisure!

Roger Wilson, FFPS Project Consultant.

Glimmer of hope for proboscis monkeys

Results of a recent survey give some hope for one of the few surviving populations of proboscis monkeys *Nasalis larvatus* in Sarawak. This species is endemic to Borneo and is restricted almost entirely to the rapidly dwindling coastal forests. Its numbers are declining in all parts of the island. Previous surveys in the Malaysian state of Sarawak in north-west Borneo showed that possibly only 1000 individuals remain in the state (Bennett, 1988).

The latest survey was conducted in 1988 by a team from Nottingham University, which studied the species in one of Sarawak's only two totally protected areas where proboscis monkeys occur, Bako National Park. This small park, only 24 sq km, is surrounded on three sides by sea. It contains a mixture of coastal habitat types, including mangrove, beach forest, and small areas of tall peat swamp/dipterocarp forest. About 90 per cent of the park is low-stature, nutrient-poor, tropical heath forest. The study showed that the monkeys rarely use the tropical heath forest and also frequently cross the park boundary, therefore using areas inside and outside the park. Animals straying outside the park are at risk from illegal hunters. In spite of this the team estimated there to be about 213 proboscis monkeys in Bako. This makes it possibly the largest surviving population of the species in Sarawak, and is slightly higher than an estimate made in 1981 of between 106 and 144 individuals (Salter and Mackenzie, 1985). While the difference in numbers might be due to differences in counting techniques, it appears that the Bako population is at least being maintained.

References

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A sanctuary for migrant waders in Seychelles

In 1986 4 km of coral reef were dredged on the east coast of Mahe, Seychelles and used to create a large area of land. While this reclamation destroyed a considerable area of living coral it inadvertently created an area of habitat that is rare in Seychelles. The settlement pond used during dredging remained as a depression in the coral rubble and during the rains of December 1986–February 1987 it partially filled with water. This coincided with the presence of migratory shorebirds in the region and the open area of shallow water attracted unexpectedly large numbers of birds.

The area came to be known as the 'bird sanctuary' and was marked as a reserve on the development plans for the reclamation. Plans were drawn up for the creation of hides around the pool and the World Wide Fund for Nature donated binoculars for the proposed reserve. After the initial enthusiasm, interest lapsed and attempts were made to remove the reserve from the plans, giving as the reason the area's proximity to the international airport and the danger to air transport. This was publicly refuted by representatives of ornithological organizations (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and International Council for Bird Protection) on the grounds that it was too far from the airport to be a danger and would in fact attract birds away from the runway. However, by the end of 1990 the exact status of the 'sanctuary' was unclear.

In 1991 the East Coast Development Project was extended further. The area of land was expanded and coral was stockpiled for future use, making it necessary to move a rubbish tip. It was proposed that the rubbish be moved into the bird sanctuary and covered with coral, supporting this by stating that

migratory birds no longer used the site and that the water was polluted. R. Gerlach pointed out that the lack of birds at the time was due to their being at their summer breeding grounds. Then the following week the first migratory birds of the season arrived. Radio Television Seychelles covered the arrival of the birds and also countered the pollution claim by demonstrating that aquatic life was still present in the pool. As a result of these protests, the decision to fill in the wetland was reversed and the reserve was reinstated on the development plans, although the area allocated is now only 29,000 sq m (the original sedimentation depression was 75,000 sq km).

The Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles, which was established in February 1992, will assume responsibility for the reserve's management, ensuring that it is fenced to prevent disturbance from people and stray dogs. It will also create and maintain pools and sandbars, and control and monitor the spread of vegetation around the pools.

The reserve attracts many migrants, including species rarely recorded in the Seychelles and a few new species for the islands. Weekly counts started in December 1991 and reveal that approximately 500 birds use the reserve regularly. This is a small number compared with most major wader sites but it is by far the largest number recorded in the Seychelles and the site is thus an important point in the migration route over the western Indian Ocean. The area is also important as a feeding ground for the grey heron, which once bred in the Seychelles but had not done so recently until the only known pair on Mahe bred in 1990. They bred again in 1991 and 1992 and the population now stands at nine. This small wetland is now more important to birds than it was when it was first created because the most recent reclamations have covered virtually the last of the mudflats. It is hoped that when the development of the reclaimed land does occur, the sanctuary will be preserved as the only environmentally favourable aspect of the East Coast Project; it is but a small return for the loss of such a large area of coastal reef.

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