

SSC in Perth, Australia

The IUCN General Assembly in Perth (see page 00) was preceded by meetings of the various Commissions of the IUCN, including a 2-day, 65th Meeting of the Species Survival Commission. The SSC has a new Chairman, George Rabb of the Chicago Zoo, and a new logo based on a rock painting of an eland in a Drakensberg cave and attributed to the Sand People of southern Africa, a newly designed *Species* magazine and a revised structure. One important change is that every member of a specialist group will become a member of SSC automatically meaning that groups will have only full members and the category of corresponding members will be abolished.

There are expected to be 100 specialist groups in the next triennium as well as interdisciplinary groups, such as those dealing with captive breeding, trade and veterinary matters. Because SSC groups have historically been chosen because of the particular interests of members rather than to meet the objective needs for the conservation of these groups, some taxonomic groups are not well covered by the existing network, for instance plants, invertebrates, amphibians and fish. These four large groups contain many threatened taxa as well as many of considerable economic importance and task forces are planned to discover how best to tackle the problems of their conservation.

The SSC's programme received a welcome gift in 1990 of SFr1.5 million from the Peter Scott Memorial Appeal for Conservation. The money is to be used over the next 3 years and was made possible in large part by a donation from the Government of Oman with the approval of His Majesty the Sultan. Sir Peter (FFPS's late President) was SSC Chairman for 17 years and was personally involved in assisting wildlife conservation in Oman. The gift gives the SSC the greatest opportunity in its history to review the conservation needs of various species, to assess priorities and formulate the actions that need to be taken to allow species to recover to safe and productive levels. As a direct result of the gift a new fund-raising officer, Mena Boulanger, has been



SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION

The new logo of the SSC is based on a rock painting of an eland.

recruited to work with George Rabb and the headquarters staff in Gland; one of her main tasks is to raise funds to match the Omani gift. She will also be working closely with SSC Specialist groups to help with their funding when necessary.

About 25 of the Specialist Groups reported at the meeting. Some of the facts revealed were as follows. The 30,000–55,000 Asian elephants that remain are dispersed in 5000 sq km and habitat loss is the main cause of their continued decline. However, Asian rhinos are still suffering from poaching, in Sumatra, India, Java and Vietnam, where some were still found to survive recently. The main problem is that there are not enough funds or personnel to carry out effective anti-poaching efforts. The Cat Specialist Group has a membership of about 100, most of them working in the field. The opening up of the USSR has highlighted their concerns about the Amur leopard and Siberian tiger; trophy hunting has been proposed for the latter because protection has apparently resulted in problems of predation of livestock. The Amur leopard, on the other hand, has declined to very low numbers and there have been appeals to the West for captive-bred animals for restocking; however, most Amur leopards in captivity are not pure and new proposals involve captive breeding in the USSR using young leopards captured in the wild. In India the situation is critical despite the success of Project Tiger, and the problem of tiger attacks, on people collecting wood for example, have to be solved. The Cracid Group reported on the rediscovery of a guan in Colombia and said that 70 Cracidae Action Plan projects had been prepared.

The Crocodile Specialist Group has been reorganized on a regional and subject basis, and has appointed an executive officer. This

has enabled the group to grow in membership to about 300 people, with the regional chairmen dealing with much of the work. The group is very concerned about the recent import of Nile crocodiles into Brazil (see *Oryx*, 24, 198–199).

Of the world's 230 species of primate half are in trouble and one-fifth are endangered. With 200 members the Primate Specialist Group is considering decentralizing and an executive officer is being appointed. New Regional Action Plans are imminent and existing ones are being updated. The Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group is another large one, with several chairmen and a director appointed to ensure that the Action Plan is implemented.

Other Groups have smaller memberships but larger numbers of species within their care. The Lepidoptera Specialist Group, with responsibility for 150,000 species, has published a *Directory of Lepidoptera Conservation Projects* under way in 25 countries. Most of the current work is on butterflies and a considerable amount needs to be carried out on moths as well as on complete faunal surveys in tropical regions. The 10,000 or so species that are the concern of the Pteridophyte Specialist Group are concentrated mostly in the moist tropics. The group is still small and is engaged on a study of the trade in tree ferns and *Selaginella*. The Ant Specialist Group has renamed itself the Social Insects Specialist Group but needs members to address the task of identifying which social insects are most at risk.

The Antelope Specialist Group's Africa survey is almost complete; the best hope for conserving antelopes appears to be to develop programmes whereby local people can derive economic benefits by cropping them. The chairman of the group is not in favour of domesticating wild species because wherever it has happened it has resulted in the elimination of the progenitor. Next triennium the group will concentrate on antelopes in Asia, The Australasian Marsupials and Monotremes Specialist Group has numerous action plans in preparation and with TRAFFIC Oceania has published *Monotremes and Marsupials in Trade*.

The group reported that the Tropical Forestry Action Plan for Papua New Guinea includes substantial resources for marsupial conservation. The Veterinary Group reported that in the next triennium it would concentrate on cryopreservation procedures, the disease implications associated with translocation of wild animals and fertility control in super-abundant populations. The group is most concerned about the fact the FAO had so far failed to find the funds necessary to contain the outbreak of the New World screwworm in Libya (see p. 66) and said that unless they did the outlook was bleak for domestic stock and wildlife. It also expressed concern over the finding that two wild chimpanzees in Gabon and one smuggled into Belgium were infected with an HIV-like virus, which makes the chimpanzee the most likely experimental animals for an AIDS vaccine. Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) was also of concern; it had been hoped that the offspring of BSE-infected cattle and antelope would not be affected, but those hopes had been dashed by the recent death of an antelope calf born to a mother that subsequently died of BSE. The Cetacean Specialist Group reported that several of their Action Plan projects had been completed. One, on the conservation of the baiji, showed that these animals migrated over distances of more than 200 km.

The African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group reported that in Yemen, currently suffering from a recession, dagger handles were now being made from plastic rather than rhino horn, but that the demand still exists for horn and that the situation will revert once the recession is over. In China antique rhino horn cups were being smashed up and used to make medicine balls.

Action Plans

The Canid and Wolf Specialist Groups have prepared an Action Plan for the conservation of the 34 species of Canidae, which has just been published under the title *Foxes, Wolves, Jackals and Dogs*. The Chairman of the Canid Specialist Group, Dr David Macdonald (also a

member of the FFPS Council) points out that this group of animals has preoccupied the imagination of mankind for millennia and the contradictory facets of their relationships with people perplex the conservationists. He is dismayed that by mismanagement we are forcing several species into extinction. This book has 116 pages and covers each species with a full description of the population and habits, commercial use, threats, current research programmes and conservation measures.

The Asian Elephant: An Action Plan for Conservation has been compiled by Charles Santiapillai and Peter Jackson. The Asian elephant is in grave danger, with a surviving wild population of 30,000-55,000. Habitat loss and pressures of human population are the major threats in the 13 Asian countries where it is found. Elephants are the backbone of the timber industry in several Asian countries and without elephants it might become more profitable to clear-fell forests rather than manage them sustainably. The Action Plan points out that it will not be possible to save all of Asia's wild elephants, but that losses can be kept to a minimum if economic development plans take into account the needs of elephants, and planning for elephant conservation takes into consideration the needs of local people.

The plan urges that national conservation strategies include elephant conservation in countries where the species is found. It suggests establishing managed elephant ranges and protected areas, national and international corridors to facilitate elephant migration, steps to reduce conflicts with people and guidelines on how to stop elephants raiding crops.

In order to promote the implementation of the Action Plan the SSC has established the Asian Elephant Conservation Centre in Bangalore, India. It will be working with governments and NGOs.

Seven global recommendations from the Otter Specialist Group are contained in *Otters: an Action Plan for their Conservation*. They range from a ban on PCBs and similar persistent environmental contaminants to public awareness campaigns. There are 13 otter species in the world and 8 are rated as 'vulnerable' or 'insufficiently known'. There are chap-

ters on the biology of otters, threats, captive species, reintroductions and separate strategies for each region where otters are found.

These Action Plans are available from IUCN Publication Services Unit, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, UK.

SSC Newsletters

Two new specialist group newsletters have appeared recently. The first issue of *Tapir Conservation*, newsletter of the Tapir Specialist Group, appeared in September 1990, edited by Sharon Matola, chairman of the group. Only four species of tapir exist, all in the tropics and all threatened by habitat destruction. The issue contains several reports from the field, some on projects started only recently, and several proposals that need funding. *Re-introduction News*, the newsletter of the Re-introduction Specialist Group, made its first appearance in November 1990. The group has 80 members, with a bias towards those with experience of large mammal reintroductions, and seeks new members to cover a wide range of expertise. Two issues of the newsletter are planned each year; this one contains updates of black-footed ferrets, red wolves (see p. 71) Bali mynah, Przewalski's horse and Arabian oryx.

Requests

Michael Klemens has been appointed to direct the implementation of the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Action Plan. During his 3-year assignment he will update the individual action plans, co-ordinate recovery efforts and work with co-chairmen and SSC staff to identify funding for various plans. He is requesting newspaper clippings and all other material pertinent to turtle and tortoise conservation including high quality colour transparencies for presentations for educational and fund-raising purposes.

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