

## News from the Australasian Section of the Society of Conservation Biology: June 2007

HARRY F. RECHER<sup>1</sup>

### Inaugural conference of the Australasian Section of the Society for Conservation Biology

THE Australasian section of the Society for Conservation Biology welcomes you to its inaugural meeting "The Biodiversity Extinction Crisis — An Australasian and Pacific Response" at the University of New South Wales from July 10–12, 2007. **Registration is now open.** This will be the first meeting of its kind in the Australasian region and aims to draw together a range of conservation professionals from the greater Australian/Pacific region (including Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Island Nations). This meeting will be of interest to researchers, students, managers, policy makers, social scientists from governmental and non-governmental organizations. We hope that this meeting will become a regular event on the conference calendar in the Australasian region. Please join us.

This promises to be a terrific meeting with a range of exceptional plenary speakers, excellent symposia, exciting sessions and extraordinary social functions being lined up! Our plenary speakers include Michael Soulé, Michael Archer, Stuart Bunn, Chris Dickman, Alexandra de Blas, Hugh Possingham and Peter Brussard, David Towns, John Woinarski, Dick Watling, and David Claudie. The conference themes focus on five major areas of concern including: 1) challenges for the Australasian/Pacific region (particular issues for this part of the world), 2) managing threatening processes of universal importance, 3) case studies of conservation in action, including biodiversity monitoring and assessment, 4) conservation science and policy, and 5) conservation science and the community (non-government organizations, indigenous people).

Six symposia are being organized that focusing on these themes. These symposia are: 1) Whole of landscape conservation in Australia — approaches and case studies, 2) The role of invasive species in extinctions, 3) Do dingoes have a role in the conservation of Australian ecosystems, 4) Conservation genetics within the Australasian region, 5) Legislative and institutional arrangements for biodiversity protection in Australia and the Pacific and 6) Community partnerships for effective conservation.

Our social events kick off with a welcome mixer on the evening of Monday, July 9 at the School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of New South Wales. On Tuesday, July 10, just for the students attending the conference, there will be a student mixer/luncheon and on that same evening we will hold a special public forum on Climate Change and Water at Taronga Zoo (book tickets for this event early as seats will be limited!). On the evening of Wednesday, July 11 join us for a unique conference dinner and harbour cruise aboard Captain Cook Cruises. For those who are attending from out of town or overseas there will be additional options for booking post-conference sightseeing tours in the Sydney area.

Visit <http://www.biodiversity2007.com/> for further details.

### News from Craig Morley, Branch President

1) The Nature Conservancy is offering a package for people from developing countries to join the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) for free (for 2 years). If there is anyone you think that is worthy of nomination for this, could they contact Kat at the SCB EO (Kathryn Powers: [kpm@conbio.org](mailto:kpm@conbio.org)) or look on the SCB website for all the details.

2) There are many conservation training packages online at the SCB website. This is good for teachers and educators on conservation training and case studies. Please suggest this site to anyone who you think might wish to learn more about conservation and what the SCB is doing in training the educators.

3) We did not offer any suggestions from our region for the annual SCB awards. We have many great conservation people in our region and so I would like people to think about 3–4 possible candidates for next year's annual conference (people from NGO's, Universities, Government, Community Conservationists etc.).

4) We have no (active) SCB chapters in our region. Those of us in universities could drum up many members and we should also push the development of chapters during our own regional conference. The SCB offers help to establishing these, but at the end of the day they are a good way to get people actively involved in conservation — in their town, region, country.

5) I would like to point out that a new journal will soon be published by Blackwell's. It will be called Conservation Letters — similar in principle to Ecology Letters. It will have a quick turnaround and will have letters/articles with short sharp conservation messages.

6) We need to think about where we will hold the 2011 annual conference. The SCB Board of Governors has decided that it will be held in our section and so we need to think about where it could be held and who might host it. Personally (and this is all this is), I think it should be in either New Zealand or the Pacific Islands (if they have the capacity?). Why?, Australia has already had

the global SCB meeting once in 1998 and we are holding our section's regional conference in Sydney this year and so it might be good to host it elsewhere. However, this does not mean we that we should rule any Australian location out. Indeed, we should look at all possible venues and options before any final decisions are made.

### BULA COLUMN

#### A plea for holism in conservation and development as a rational means of progress

AARON P. JENKINS<sup>2</sup>

*"A balanced perspective cannot be acquired by studying disciplines in pieces but through pursuit of consilience among them."*

E. O. Wilson 1998

The vast majority of current approaches to conservation, conservation science and in the broader context, global development, are fundamentally flawed by myopia. This unfortunate situation is brought about by almost every major institution we have encountered in our lives. In the majority of education systems we are encouraged to become increasingly specialized as we "progress" with clear and increasing division between sciences, social sciences, art and the more athletic pursuits. Even within one's chosen field, say biology, the degree of specialization becomes so intensified that, in most cases, at the doctoral or post-doctoral level the molecular bio-chemist, for example, can no longer communicate the results of their work meaningfully with the field ecologist because they barely have a common language. We are becoming so pigeon-holed that eventually, while sitting in our increasingly specialized forums discussing the cutting edge of this or that, we have lost sight of the forest for the trees.

For example, at the most recent International Coral Reef Symposium,

while there was much discourse on marine protected areas and the role of social science in informing the reef biologists of the social conditions under which reef management works best, there were only perhaps 5 of the 800 plus presentations in which social science and marine biological data were integrated in a meaningful way. While the social science, natural science dichotomy is clearly inhibiting our progress in successfully managing natural systems, even the fundamental division between terrestrial, freshwater and marine science is also counterproductive. Within conservation NGO's, government departments and development agencies alike there are marine sections, freshwater sections, terrestrial sections, health sections and rarely the twain shall meet. Clearly the interlinkages between these sections in appropriate forums and understanding the linkages in natural processes are the key to progressing conservation science and the larger field of international development. Our depth and diversity of knowledge will only increase as the gaps between these disciplines diminish.

After a decade of working in Papua New Guinea to help establish community level marine protected area networks, the scope of the problem and solution have become more and more apparent. Compared to the rest of the Pacific, PNG has the highest maternal mortality, infant mortality and fertility rates; the lowest levels of education and literacy, the lowest life expectancy, and the highest prevalence rates of TB, HIV, hepatitis B and malaria. The linkages between environmental issues (erosion, chemical contamination of land and water, fecal contamination of streams, increased use of intensive and damaging fishing methods, increasingly shortened fallow periods for planting, etc.) and public health deterioration in PNG are clear. For example, on the north coast, the interlinking issues are quite plain to see.

The Madang Lagoon on the north coast of PNG holds 11% of the world's reef fish species and is a globally important biodiversity site. But the populations who live there are suffering from poverty due, in part, to rapid population growth and declining natural resources. Locally managed conservation projects have helped to increase dwindling fish stock but the increases are largely of algae-eating fish because the water quality in the lagoon has been altered by upstream activities and a coastal fish cannery. High levels of coliform bacteria entering the lagoon through rivers indicate that the people upstream have practices that are polluting their streams. The fish factory hires young women from all the nearby villages, but never makes their jobs secure, keeping them on a temporary basis, and paying them under minimum wage levels. These factors keep them vulnerable to advances from the men, some of whom offer the young women a tin of fish as the price for sex. As HIV spreads like wildfire in PNG, environmental degradation and increasingly poor families drive young women into prostitution for commodities and cash. Public health programmes are essential at such workplaces, but addressing the water pollution as well as the population growth and conservation management is a better, more sustainable solution than *only* to offer condoms and information or *only* to set up marine protected areas.

In conclusion, this is a plea to the wider conservation and development fields to remove the blinkers imposed by our respective specialties and seek holism and interdisciplinary as a rational approach to making a lasting contribution to the earth and its inhabitants.

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