

Biodiversity Extinction Crisis

“THE Biodiversity Extinction Crisis, a Pacific and Australasian response” is the theme for the Australasian Section of the Society for Conservation Biology’s (SCB-A’s) inaugural regional conference. The idea of holding this conference has been a few years in the fermenting, mulling, and processing stages and the organizing committee is still in the initial stages of logistic planning, but in 2007 this meeting will be a reality. This will not be the first time that the Society has held a conference in the region, however. Many will remember the highly successful Society for Conservation Biology conference that was held at Macquarie University in 1998. That conference predated the formation of the international sections of SCB and attracted approximately 800 world-class conservation scientists and practitioners from around the globe, indicating not only the strength of the profession but also the strong need and desire for such a platform, particularly within Australia and the Australasian region.

Since that meeting, unfortunately, there has been little to fill the void for conservation biologists and practitioners within our region. The Society for Conservation Biology holds its annual conferences, of course, and this is the premier international event, gathering the glitterati of the professional conservation world. With the internationalization of SCB and the formation of regional sections, the aim has been to hold conferences in alternative years in the US or in one of the regions. But we all know how expensive travel is from this region and just how prohibitive that can be. Sometimes those international conferences are just too far away, both physically and financially. Although many other local or regional societies within our region have a conservation component to their meetings, there has been no single conference dedicated to conservation biology in all its myriad guises within our region since the 1998 meeting.

Take, for example, the Genetics Society of Australasia, the Ecological Society of Australia, or the Australasian section of the Wildlife Disease Association. Each of these societies have important conservation sessions at their meetings. However, each of these approaches to conservation are discipline-based and if, for example, you count yourself as a conservation geneticist, but not an ecologist, it is unlikely that you will attend an ESA meeting. Similarly if you are a conservation practitioner working at the coal-face of managing threatened species, it is unlikely that you will have the time, resources,

or inclination to attend the conservation sessions of the Wildlife Disease Association or those of the Genetics Society. Similarly, there are taxon-based organizations such as the Mammal Society and Birds Australia that have significant conservation elements to their meetings. However, if you study declining marine invertebrates or have an applied programme focused on community restoration of woodlands, you are probably not very likely to find yourself at either of these meetings.

The time to change this is nigh. The Australasian section of SCB has changed and grown from its initial “hatchling” stage in 2002 when the section was formed, to a “fledgling” in 2004 when the links were formed between SCB-A and *Pacific Conservation Biology*. Now with the maturity of a few years behind the section and a strong and dedicated Board we will host our first regional conference in 2007.

We intend to draw together conservation biologists and practitioners from all disciplines and from all taxonomic areas, with the focus on the Australasian and Pacific region. Our region faces particular challenges including conservation on islands, rising sea levels, changing rainfall patterns, and land and water degradation. These issues are overlaid by the general problems of habitat loss and fragmentation, invasive species, pollution and overharvesting. We will cover the gamut of conservation, from policy to community and from regional challenges to case studies of conservation management.

The meeting will be held from June 10–13, 2007 at the University of New South Wales in Sydney Australia. Choosing the timing of this conference has been difficult and critical. To explain: the main intention was to avoid clashing with other related meetings within the region, as well as to avoid clashing with our parent body’s meeting being held in 2007 in South Africa. That left us a narrow window of opportunity during the winter term break. Already there has been some criticism of the timing of this meeting and possible negative repercussions for the African meeting of SCB with the close timing of the international meeting and the Australasian section meeting. The Australasian organizing committee deliberated this — if we did not have the meeting at this time, our regional meeting would have had to have been pushed back another year, which was deemed too long to wait. The conservation issues facing our region are too serious for further delay.

PACIFIC CONSERVATION BIOLOGY

The next time that the Society for Conservation Biology will hold their international meeting within the Australasian region will be in 2011. While we look forward to welcoming the international community of professional conservation scientists and managers at that time, thirteen years between conferences is a long time to wait. In the meantime, we hope that you will join us in 2007 and at subsequent conferences in the future.

Please join us. We plan for this meeting to attract the media and lift the debate on conservation issues from out of the narrow conservation research and management arenas

to where the community can participate. This does not mean the conference will be any less founded on good science than any other meeting, but is recognition of the need for scientists, and conservation biologists in particular, to engage the community and provide the community with clear choices. At the moment, the community hears little about the environment and a great deal about economic development and growth. There is an urgent need to change this and a strong, scientific meeting of conservation professionals from throughout Australasia is the platform to achieve this.

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