

# THE IUCN CONGRESS, BARCELONA, SPAIN — OCTOBER 2008

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One has to attend a quadrennial meeting of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) to understand the magnitude and scope of activities of the World's largest conservation organisation. The recent Congress of the IUCN was held at Barcelona, Spain from 5-14 October 2008, a city known for its architectural beauty, especially of Gaudi fame. This was the second time I had attended an IUCN Congress, the last one was in Bangkok, Thailand in 2004, and it still surprised me to know there were 12,000 registered participants at this one. The IUCN Congress is the biggest mela one can see in the conservation world. All kinds of activities, seminars, forums, trainings, plenary, meetings, networking, wheeling-dealing, campaigning, politicking, etc. takes place in the span of those crucial 10 days spread across two distinct sets of activities called the Forum and Assembly.



The Forum is the fun part where the scientific and conservation sessions happen. In the four-day forum (6-9 October), which was hosted by the IUCN and its member organizations and partners, more than 800 programmes including workshops, seminars, discussions, training courses, partnership-building and cinema took place. A series of challenges, opportunities and potential solutions to address the issue of a more sustainable future in the next two decades were observed through three streams – A New Climate for Change, Healthy Environments – Healthy People, and Safeguarding the Diversity of Life.

To make events at the forum more understandable and accessible, the organizers had broken down the forum into journeys. The 12 journeys identified were – Mediterranean, Protected Area, Species, Rights and Conservation, Water, Energy, Forests, Marine, Islands, Law and Governance, Bio-cultural Diversity and Indigenous Peoples, and Market and Business. The Congress had several convenient areas for networking called pavilions, one of which was on Species where all the Species Survival Commission's

members got an opportunity to meet one another, present and hear pre-determined activities. A stage set for the activities provided a continuous showcase to understand the happenings in the species world around the globe.

The highlight of the species event was the release of the 2008 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the focus of which this year was the culmination of the assessment of all the mammals of the world through a collaborative process under the Global Mammal Assessment. A fourth of the world's mammals are threatened with a high risk of extinction. A highlight for India was the inclusion of 14 species of tarantulas in the Red List for the first time; hopefully, will bring about some conservation priorities to this and other small creatures.



Other events such as Exhibition, where more than a 100 stalls were on display and Special Events such as the International Women Entrepreneur Fair, Learning Opportunities, Opening of the Forum, Opening Ceremony of the IUCN Congress and Sailing to Barcelona were part of the agenda. The Forum activities led to the next important feature, the Assembly from the 10-14 October.

The Members' Assembly with the participation of more than a 1000 IUCN member organizations, both government and non-government from 160 countries discussed and debated over several important issues to do with sustainability, future, environment, global climate change, species and policies. An important aspect of the Assembly was also the election of the President and the Council for the next quadrennium, and the approval of IUCN's work programme for that term. The build up to the Assembly elections started from the Forum days with hectic lobbying and campaigning the different positions and candidates. Typical politicking, cajoling, fighting, and accusing strategies were employed to elect several positions.

Two positions of importance to our context in India were the election of Dr. Ashok Khosla, an Indian, as the President of IUCN and Dr. Simon Stuart, an Indiaphile as the Chair of the Species Survival Commission.



SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION



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