

Ashok Khosla, new President of IUCN SSC

Ashok Khosla is known to ZOO for many years. He was an very early advisor and encourager. We later learned much from his organisation, Developmental Alternatives. Ashok Khosla has been a key element of the environmental scene for well over three decades. He started the Department of Environment, Government of India. He founded the innovative NGO Developmental Alternatives, which researched human needs and how to supply them in an environmentally friendly way. Ashok's Acceptance Speech, at IUCN 14 October 2008, is on the IUCN website ... in this page, we give some of the highlights.



I know that it will not be easy to fill the space and expectations created by my predecessors...however, with the excellent members you have also elected for the Council, I feel we have a team that can deliver the kind of results you would like to have from us. IUCN, celebrating six decades this year, has hundreds of ongoing programmes and commitments – and most of them are highly appropriate and relevant. These activities will continue to receive the full support of the Council and strengthened where they need to be. But the times are changing, and the issues, problems, contexts we must deal with are changing even more rapidly. My starting point for working with my fellow Council members to define the immediate and strategic priorities of the Union will be the commitments I made in my earlier speech.

First, we will assume responsibility to protect the biosphere focusing on conservation of biodiversity in all its manifestations. We will bring the issues of biodiversity into the centre stage of public awareness, media concern and decision making at the local, national and global levels. To convince the world, we must establish the strongest, most incontrovertible evidence for the value of doing so and the costs of losing it, promoting deep scientific investigations by our Commissions. IUCN will mobilize resources needed to send a clear and unambiguous messages that cannot be ignored by decision makers in government, private sector or civil society. IUCN will design an aggressive and effective outreach strategy. In this effort, our Members are uniquely positioned to take front line responsibility to activate communities, media, companies and public authorities. Clearly, IUCN is the body that can and must do this.

Second, IUCN will have to build on its excellent initiative to analyse the economics and distributive issues of conserving or not conserving biodiversity (TEEB) and I will also propose the establishment of a World Commission to investigate the deeper

implications of "Green Carbon" options such as sequestration, REDD and biofuels.

The third commitment was to bring clarity into the basis for establishing appropriate relationships between IUCN and business. IUCN must engage with corporations, large, medium and small. However, the terms of such engagement must be such as to lead to positive conservation outcomes, and ensure that at no time is IUCN's integrity or capacity to fulfill its mission compromised in any way.

The fourth commitment concerns the need to bring a better balance between the the three legs of the biodiversity stool, that is to raise our attention and work on ecosystem processes to the level we have achieved on species and habitats. The rich and the affluent are not the only ones who have a destructive impact on the environment and biodiversity. The poor, out of the exigencies of survival, often also destroy the local resources – the soils, waters, forests, biomass – making what were renewable resources into essentially non-renewable ones. In many ways, poverty is a major threat to nature and biodiversity, no less than the consumption and production patterns of today's industrialised economy. The work started by the Union on sustainable livelihoods and the relationship between biodiversity and jobs is of critical importance and must be nurtured by all parts of IUCN. It is the value of ecosystem services that will provide the strongest rationale for investing in conservation in the future. One of the most valuable ecosystem services is the knowledge accumulated over billions of years by nature – the basis of technologies that serve human needs without destroying the environment: Biomimicry. I firmly believe that IUCN must urgently build its capacity in this science.

For our conservation efforts to be in the right direction and to be sustained, they must be driven by the highest ethical considerations and a deep respect for all living things. Given its importance to planetary survival, the practice of conservation is today among the highest callings a professional can aspire to. It must therefore set the highest benchmarks for personal, scientific and ethical commitment and integrity, for which I will ask the Council to establish the necessary mechanisms to assist the Director General in ensuring these.

My fifth commitment was to act as a facilitator for the work and interaction of all parts of the Union, the Council, the Members, the Commissions and the Secretariat so they mutually support each other and have a clear understanding of their roles to enable the entire Union to act in unison, as a result-oriented single organism. IUCN must maintain the best possible working relationship between the Union and the external partners – conservation organisations, the donors and the agencies to enable us to maximise our

results — in policy influence and in impact on the ground. In particular, given our special position in the UN system, we have a particular opportunity to use it as a means of globalising our agenda, and I expect that the Councilors will join the Director General and me in fully exploiting it.

IUCN must bring the Union nearer to its members. For this, I will work with the Council and the Director General to strengthen the regional capacities of the Union, a goal to which we are all already committed. The days of centralised management and control are long over and whether in the public or private sectors, distributed structures are recognised as being much more relevant to today's needs. I will work closely with the Secretariat in developing training modules that help the members and commissions to build their own capacities to mobilise resources.

It takes decades of hard and self-less work to build an organisation like our Union. It can take but a few months of careless inattention to destroy it. We will continue to face ignorance, greed-based resistance, vested interests and other external factors to hinder our work. But these only strengthen our resolve and ability to overcome them. However, internal dissension, professional friction, office politics – not to mention compartmentalisation and fragmentation – can bring the effectiveness of an organisation to a standstill in not time.

I believe that the Union is generally in good health, but I would like to work closely with the Director General in setting up decision and reporting systems that are clear, transparent, accountable and result-enhancing. For this, as I said on an earlier occasion, the Council must set clear policies, the Director General must implement them and be held accountable by the Council.

Colleagues, friends, the world is today at a crossroads. And so is IUCN. The dire state of our natural world demands an increasing involvement of all sectors of human activity. We either continue to talk to ourselves, or we reach out to the wider world. The second option is risky, but I believe we have no choice but to engage new partners in this struggle to keep nature alive. We can dwell on our internal problems or waste precious time fiddling with our governance structures, or we can rollup our sleeves and work together. Yes, we need to work in a more collaborative and transparent way. And I am committed to doing that. But let's not waste this unique opportunity, now that the world is finally listening to our conservation message, to go out there and convince people, institutions, private companies and governments about the need to conserve nature and eradicate poverty. Finally, I wish to thank the government and people of Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain for the warmth of their hospitality and the excellent arrangements for the Congress, which has certainly the most vibrant and well attended so far. Thank you.

Interview with Dr. Simon Stuart, new Chair, Species Survival Commission

Simon Stuart is a long time friend and colleague of ZOO and WILD. We are very happy that Simon was elected Chair of the Species Survival Commission. He was kind to give us an interview.

Q. Simon, we have known you several years as a Red List-walla, coming over for CAMP and GAP workshops ... sloshing through the trenches, as it were. Will we see you in person more or less, as Chair ?

A. Good question. I think I won't have time to come to assessment workshops any more. But I will be getting around the world more, so watch out! I'll be in Bangalore in February 2009 for the 125th birthday bash of the Bombay Natural History Society, so see you there!

Q. One question people ask me here, is why the taxon specialist groups seem to consist more of people from the developed world when so much of the biodiversity is in the developing world.

A. Each specialist group appoints its own members. This is not done centrally in the SSC. But we actively encourage SGs to expand their memberships from the countries in which most of their species occur. Many have done so. However, I suspect that some SGs have found it harder to engage their memberships in developing countries, so this is something that needs to be addressed. One option that is increasingly followed in SGs is to set up regional sections. This makes it easier for people to be involved, and delegates to the work more equitably.

