

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.



Q. I have noticed myself that the local field biologists (local meaning all the native biologists from the region) seem to have a better grip on species distribution, etc. So why are their studies not taken more seriously?

A. I think this is taken seriously. It is usually the local scientists that know the species best. For example, I remember in the South Asian Amphibian CAMP that most of the participants were from the region. Many of the non-local people were workshop facilitators, not experts or data contributors!

Q. The question I get most from people here in South Asia is how to become a member of a Specialist Group. How does a local specialist become well-known enough to be recognised ?

A. Different SGs have different membership policies -some have larger, more inclusive memberships; others are smaller, limited by the ability of the voluntary chair to handle the network. We are not prescriptive on membership policies to SGs. If anyone wants to join, he or she should write to the SG Chair. It is always good to include some of your publications (in scientific journals, as well as books and reports) to establish your credentials when writing to an SG Chair. And if you know an existing member of the SG, you could request that they also write on your behalf, introducing you. But remember that there is a practical limit to SG size, so it will never be possible to keep everyone happy.

Q. As you know, we at ZOO & WILD have started regional groups in order to promote our South Asian specialists to particularly SSC and others. In the past you have been particularly encouraging and cooperative ... is this going to make up part of your vision as Chair ? I hope so !

A. Yes, this is very important. We need to be more flexible in allowing and encouraging the emergence of regional and national expressions of SSC. We need to give more thought on how to go about this, but ZOO and WILD have done a great job in blazing the trail in South Asia.

Q. Do you plan to resuscitate some of the Specialist Groups that have been dropped ? Such as the Rodent and Insectivore SG ... that was one of our regional networks which feels the impact of losing the global group.

A. We are currently planning what to do to ensure effective SSC coverage worldwide of the small mammals. I'm not yet certain what will emerge yet, but we'll have something better than what happened over the last four years. So watch this space!

Q. Do you have any plans as yet to change the way the Red List works, so that at least the endemic species assessed in their own regions can be officially taken on to the Red List faster.

A. Yes, we are looking at how to achieve this. One thing that would help would be for ZOO and WILD to get up-and-running on the new SIS database over the next six months, as this links directly to the new Red List database. Another think that needs to be done is for IUCN to carry out more training around the world, as the Red List criteria and other standards are not used consistently in different countries. If we can get to more harmonization of approach, it will make it much easier to link regional/ national lists with the global IUCN one.

Q. Any parting remarks ?

A. I very much look forward to working with you all in my new capacity. Let's aim for lasting gains in species conservation over the next four years.

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