Sundarbans mangrove ecosystem and its keystone species

Mohammed Ashraf
Working in Partnership to Build Expertise in Tropical Ecology and Conservation by Rosie Trevelyan and Brigid Barry

Conservation of biological diversity depends upon a critical mass of dedicated, well-trained people who truly care about the environment. The work of the Tropical Biology Association (TBA) is helping to achieve this goal in Africa through practical training alongside its global network of conservation scientists.

The TBA is best known for its field courses in East Africa and Madagascar that provide hands-on training in tropical ecology and conservation to graduate-level biologists. The courses bring together African and European students in equal numbers so that participants can share experiences and make international links. A recent student wrote, “We studied more than conservation and tropical ecology, we learned about the culture, experiences, and works of students and professors from all over the world.”

Following their TBA courses, our trainees receive a targeted program of follow-up support to help them apply their new skills and contacts back home. With more than 800 trainees from 170 institutions within 40 different countries, our alumni network has an extensive range. Through constant feedback and a well-structured database we are able to provide our alumni with advice on grants, employment opportunities, Ph.D. studentships, and masters scholarships. Each year, the TBA sponsors memberships in the Society for Conservation Biology for more than 40 African alumni and offers three or four masters scholarships to help recent alumni develop their careers further. We are very proud of the TBA follow-up support program and will continue to develop the program in the future.

BUILDING BRIDGES WORLDWIDE by David Ferguson

As a recipient of a 2005 Distinguished Service Award from SCB, I am both honored and awed by this recognition. To have the opportunity to provide information on the countries, projects, and individuals that I have been fortunate enough to work with over the years is another unexpected pleasure. I have never considered myself anything more than a simple human being who, through some miraculous series of events, has been provided with a chance to give back something positive to this world that has given my family and me life and sustenance. In my maturation process, it became so evident that there are roles for many to play; for me, reaching out to others, sharing information, providing a step up when possible, and emphasizing the spirit of cooperation was the obvious and most effective way to go. I consider myself one link in the global chain of people around the world trying to make the world a better place. The chain is only as strong as the weakest link.

Enhancing the Impact of Conservation Science SCB’s Strategic Plan 2006–2010

In the 20 years since SCB was incorporated, our organization has grown and flourished. We are now a global community of more than 9000 conservation professionals working to better understand and conserve biological diversity around the world. Conservation Biology is the leading journal in our field, and Conservation In Practice is developing a committed readership. Our annual meetings bring together scientists and practitioners from around the world to share research results and case studies in conservation. In 2005, more than 1600 individuals from 68 countries attended our annual meeting in Brasilia. Our members are active participants in seven Regional Sections and a small, dedicated staff effectively runs the Executive Office.

In 2004, SCB’s Board of Governors chartered a committee to look ahead and define key strategic goals for SCB over the next five years. The planning effort was launched at the 2004 annual meeting, informed by a survey of the members in late 2004 and by an organizational assessment completed by an outside consultant in late 2004 – early 2005. The draft strategic plan was completed in February 2005, and reviewed by the Board during its March 2005 retreat. Member comments were solicited by email and incorporated into the final document approved by the Board and presented in Brasilia at the annual members’ meeting.

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ASIA

Our first regional conference, Biodiversity Conservation in Asia, Current Status and Future Perspectives, will be held 17–20 November 2005 in Katmandu, Nepal. More than 150 speakers have registered, representing about 15 Asian countries. Details of the conference are available at www.conbio.org/Asia or from Linda Whittaker (olsvig2000@yahoo.com).

Trans-boundary Biodiversity Conservation Between Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR

After completion of Management of the Phatam Protected Forests Complex to promote cooperation for trans-boundary biodiversity conservation between Thailand, Cambodia and Lao (Phase I), the Royal Forest Department (main agency) of Thailand and Forestry Administration of Cambodia jointly developed the trans-boundary project Phase II. Phase II will continue efforts to conserve biodiversity and extend the scope of project area to cover the Emerald Triangle Protected Forests Complex between Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao PDR. This project was approved by the International Tropical Timber Organization in December 2004 and is co-financed through that organization by Japan, Switzerland, and the United States. The objectives of the project are to strengthen cooperation between Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao for biodiversity conservation in trans-boundary conservation areas, enhance protection and monitoring of the biological resources along tri-national borders, and strengthen the involvement of local communities and stakeholders in sustainable uses and management of natural resources both in community enclaves within the protected areas and in the buffer zones. The project duration is 2005–2006. For more information, contact Yongyut Trisurat, Kasetsart University, Thailand (fforyyt@ku.ac.th).

Sundarbans Mangrove Ecosystem and its Keystone Species

Sundarbans (Bangladesh) mangrove forest is the largest contiguous mangrove ecosystem in the world. At 10,000 square km, it is also the largest wetland ecosystem with international importance for waterfowl habitats. The Bengal tiger (Panthera tigris tigris) is a focal species for biodiversity conservation management in the Sundarbans. Conservationists claim that Sundarbans harbors the largest population of tigers in south Asia. Sundarbans also acquired national and international protected area classifications; 23% of its total area has been designated as Sundarbans Wildlife Sanctuaries and United Nations World Heritage Sites. Use of the tiger as a keystone species and its impact on socioecological and economic considerations needs to be reviewed critically with the aim of formulating a management action plan for tiger conservation in the region. For more information visit www.conbio.org/Asia or contact Mohammed Ashraf, bengal_tiger010@yahoo.com.

Jeff McNeely (JAM@iucn.org) reports, “Quite a lot is going on in Asia . . . just returned from two weeks in the region. I saw considerable evidence that the governments of India and China are both taking biodiversity issues seriously, and are seeking ways to improve protected area management. The recent extermination of tigers from the Sariska Tiger Reserve in India has had repercussions at the highest levels of government, with pledges to finally do something seriously. The country’s most notorious poacher has been arrested, along with a substantial volume of illegal animal skins and other products. In China, major new projects with funding from the European Union and the GEF are working in biodiversity, an indication that the biological components of development in China are not being totally ignored. Further, increasing numbers of international NGOs are working in China and offer opportunities for the international civil society to express their support for conservation efforts in China.”

Linda Whittaker

AUSTRAL AND NEOTROPICAL AMERICA

The Austral and Neotropical America Section recently held elections for six positions on the Board of Directors. Our new Board members are R. Medellín (México), President Elect; L. Aguirre (Bolivia), Membership and Programs; A. Sanchez-Azofeifa, Chief Financial Officer (re-elected); J. Jiménez (Chile), Conservation; J. Calvo (Costa Rica), Nominations, Policy, and Audit; and C. Olivo (Bolivia / Germany), Communications (formerly Director of Nominations, Policy, and Audit). The new Board members took office at SCB’s 2005 annual meeting. Thank to outgoing Board members Martín Acosta (Cuba), Alfredo Cuarón (México), and Miguel Vázquez (Ecuador) for their service.

In August 2005, the Section Board convened at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama City for its third annual meeting. The meeting focused on preparation of the 2006–2010 Strategic Development Plan.

The Section has been quite active during 2005. In April 2005, we co-sponsored an intensive, graduate-level course, Advanced Topics in Conservation Biology, which was led by J.A. Simonetti and L. Aguirre at the Universidad Mayor de San Simon in Cochabamba, Bolivia. In addition, the Section prepared an analysis of regional needs for capacity building, published as Rodríguez, J.P., J.A. Simonetti, A. Premoli, and M.A. Marini. 2005. Conservation in Austral and Neotropical America: building scientific capacity equal to the challenges. Conservation Biology 19:969–972.

The Section fostered the presence of SCB in the region, sponsoring the Primer Congreso de Mamíferos en Bolivia in Cochabamba, Bolivia in June 2005. The Section also supported