

## **Conservation Committee**

**Committee Members:** M. S. Barbour, B. Bergstrom, B. Blood, E. E. Boydston , T. J. Doonan, T. M. Gehring, J. Goheen, A. Joachim, R. W. Kays (Chair), M. Kreuzer, A. Krevitz, C. Long, S. MacDonald, A. Morzillo, S. Nilz, D. R. Rabon, J. Rachlow, L. Randa, P. S. Reynolds, R. K. Rose, M. Schadler, W. Sechrest, S. Sheffield, Q. Shurtliff, B. Thiagarajan, V. Turner, S. Vignieri

### **Information Items:**

(1) History: The Conservation Committee was established by the ASM in 1927. First known as the Conservation of Land Mammals Committee, the name was changed to the Conservation Committee in 2002 to reflect that it deals with conservation issues that include all mammals. Currently, the committee is subdivided into seven subcommittees: Position Letters, Conservation Education, Coordination with other Organizations, Monitoring State and Federal Legislation in the USA and Canada, Monitoring International Issues, Special Projects, and Resolutions. In 2002-2003, the Aldo Leopold Conservation Award subcommittee was moved to full standing committee status.

(2) Roland Kays assumed chair of the Conservation Committee this year, and Wes Sechrest joined the committee. After a slow start, the committee made excellent progress in the spring. The committee now has a number of new initiatives that should develop over the next year (described below). Kerry Foresman, Kathleen LoGiudice, and Robert Manson all rotated off the committee this year; many thanks for their years of service.

(3) This year the committee dissolved the Mammalian Conservation News subcommittee because of the proliferation of similar internet-based information services.

(4) To improve communication between committee members, the committee instituted a listserve through the help of Brad Bergstrom and Valdosta State University.

#### **(5) Letters:**

(A) The committee submitted one letter this year questioning the Bush administration's proposed plan to facilitate the importation of endangered species into the USA. This proposal was aimed primarily at making it easier to import hunting trophies, zoo animals, and exotic pets. The committee recognized the potential conservation value of high-priced trophy hunting in the letter, but urged the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to strengthen the regulatory and enforcement aspect of the new policy. The committee specifically expressed concern about the proposed policy's ambiguity, lack of explicit enforcement language, lack of required evidence of how an animal was obtained, and the resulting potential negative impacts on the survivability of wild populations of endangered species that may result.

(B) The FWS presently is considering delisting the grey wolf in midwest and northeast states. While midwestern populations have recovered well, there are no viable populations in any northeast states. In the event that FWS endorses this proposal, the

committee has a letter prepared to question the conservation logic of eliminating protection for a population that does not yet exist, with the fear that any population that might establish itself there in the future would have no protection. The committee is waiting for announcement from FWS on this topic before acting.

(C) The committee has been monitoring other conservation issues for possible action including: aerial gunning of wolves in Alaska, changes in the way the EPA evaluates risk to endangered species, conservation of Mexican wolves, and logging in the Tongass and Chugach National Forests.

(6) Education: A brochure on the importance of conserving mammalian carnivores is nearly completed. Maps of historic and present range for all species covered have been completed and need to be integrated into the final text.

(7) Coordination with other Organizations: The committee has initiated discussions with the IUCN's Global Mammal Assessment (GMA) team to explore how we might work together to improve the conservation of mammals worldwide. One area focused on is to raise the profile of Red Data List species classified as "Data Deficient." The GMA team is presently revising this list, after which the Conservation Committee will explore how to encourage mammalogists to study this poorly known, endangered group of mammals. The GMA team is also interested in helping with the Mammalogy Expertise Database (see below).

#### **Action Items:**

(1) Special Projects – Mammalogy Expertise Database:

The Committee has been exploring the possibility of creating a database of mammalian expertise. This is an idea that the committee wishes to discuss with ASM members and the Board at the 2004 meeting. If feedback is positive, the database will be pursued. A general description of the proposed database and additional details follow.

(A) Description of proposed database

*Objective:* To create an on-line tool linking mammal experts with conservation professionals and the press in need of such expertise.

*The Problem:* Lack of information often impairs the conservation of mammals. Conservation professionals and government agencies may need biological expertise to properly manage local conservation issues. Likewise, professionals in the popular press often need expertise to bring accurate stories to the general public on issues of mammalian biology and conservation. General Internet search engines remain a blunt tool for this purpose, meaning that those in need of mammalian expertise are less likely to find it, or look for it in the first place.

*Summary Description:* Mammalogists interested in helping conservation professionals and/or reaching the public through the press will register their expertise through an on-

line survey. Professionals from conservation agencies and the public press then will be able to query the database to find an expert to consult on the issue in question. To minimize overloading mammalogists with queries from other groups (e.g. school children), professionals will be required to register and will be given a password to have access to the database; this also will permit mammalogists to accept inquiries from conservationists and/or the press.

#### (B) Details on Mammalogy Expertise Database

*Expert Registry:* Mammal experts will register themselves by filling out an on-line form, that will automatically populate a database. Care will be taken to keep the survey simple, so that it can be completed quickly. Topics covered in the survey will include:

- Name and contact information
- Academic and professional qualifications
- Taxonomic expertise (from pre-existing list)
- Geographic expertise (from pre-existing list)
- Scientific and conservation issue expertise (from pre-existing list)
- Permit contact by press and/or conservation agencies

*Expert Self Description:* To help the user select the most suitable expert for the need, some details will be needed on the expertise offered by each individual. There are a few ways to accomplish this. The easiest appears to be for experts to give their basic information (described above) and to paste all of their publications and presentations into a bibliography. Most mammalogists have such a bibliography easily at hand, and a bibliography would give database users a good idea of the background of each expert.

*User Validation:* The committee is concerned that if everyone is allowed to query the database, mammalogists will be overwhelmed by school groups and common questions. This would discourage mammalogists from signing up and would dilute the conservation power of this tool. Therefore, the committee suggests that users of the database should have to obtain a password before they have access to the database. This could be done simply by having users E-mail their credentials to the chair of the ASM Conservation Committee (or another appointee). Two passwords would be enough, one for the press and one for the conservation audience. This would allow experts to filter their contacts to the press and/or conservation professionals. Any other ideas on how to restrict users to professionals are welcomed by the committee.

*Query Design:* Once signing in, users will be able to query by any of the categories filled in by the experts. They then could obtain the contact information about experts and approach them directly with their specific questions.

*Publicizing the Database:* For this database to be successful, it must be populated by mammalogists, and advertised to the press and conservation professionals around the world. This is obviously some distance down the road, but this goal should be considered now. The committee would appreciate receiving any creative ideas on how to accomplish this.

**Respectfully submitted,**  
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