

## Biodiversity, Climate Change, CBSG and WAZA

The Year of Biodiversity may be a damp squib unless the issue of Climate Change gets equal attention. Climate change has been named as the culprit in some of the most significant species, whole taxon group and ecosystem declines. Now, there are scientific projects which report statistics other scientific facts which underpin many of these claims. As research continues, no doubt more and more claims will be proven as scientific fact.

Until that happens, however, we who are involved in Climate Change education and awareness projects must be careful about claims. Speaking only for myself, I have encountered the most amazing resistance to climate change among some of my associates in USA (You will understand why I will not name them!). My reading of that situation is that most of these people are in denial ... psychologically it is easier to deny what we do not want to be true, either because we fear its consequences or because we can't live with guilt.

Be that as it may, climate change is an daunting issue and the Conservation Breeding Specialist Group CBSG and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums WAZA have been "on it" for some years. Every year for the past maybe five years, there has been a CBSG working group (usually a 2-day one) at the Annual Meeting. Paul Pearce-Kelly, Curator at the Zoological Society of London and well-known entomologist and conservationist was the first in our community to truly raise the alarm and literally force all of us to take note.

From the first working group CBSG sent a message to WAZA with a draft statement of interest to be followed up, which WAZA has done by sending their own message at a critical time that is the recent, rather disappointing Copenhagen Climate Change conference which was held 7-18 December 2009. The Statement, which was signed by Directors of Zoos and other influential zoo personnel, the text of which message read:

### **An urgent message to world leaders.**

Through our organisations, we, directors of the international zoo and aquarium community, collectively engage with and educate 600 million visitors each year, and conduct extensive conservation activities in the wild and in our zoos and aquariums.

We send an urgent message to world leaders, stressing the extreme gravity of the climate change threat facing wildlife and natural systems.

An agreement in Copenhagen to reduce atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> to the safe level of <350 ppm is the only way to give the international conservation community a real chance to manage the negative effects of climate change on the natural world. Through concerted and immediate action, this target

is achievable. To avoid potentially catastrophic consequences for humanity and wildlife, it is essential.

CBSG and WAZA, joining hands to address this difficult challenge, have formed a Climate Change Task Force as a joining response to the extreme gravity of the climate change threat facing wildlife and natural systems. The terms of reference are:

- Catalysing our community's engagement with the urgency of the climate change threat (including our own staff, partners, visitors and outreach constituencies from children through to world leaders).
- Improving our technical response ability and capacity (including clarifying impact on our species and programmes, producing briefing and engagement materials and optimising our information dissemination networks etc).

The Task Force is being championed by Bob Lacy and Gordon McGregor Reid with invited colleagues: Suzanne Boardman, Onnie Byers, Frands Carlsen, Amy Camacho, Bob Cook, Gerald Dick, Lesley Dickie, Claudia Gili, Jo Gipps, Heribert Hofer, David Jones, Jorg Junghold, Bob Lacy, Caroline Lees, Gordon McGregor Reid, Stephen Mckeown, Phil Miller, Mark Penning, Sally Walker and chaired by Paul Pearce-Kelly.

The intention is that the steering group will liaise with a wider corresponding group, most likely to include WAZA regional association heads (or representatives) and the same for CBSG regional networks.

As Paul Pearce-Kelly comments, "our task is nothing if not challenging - as demonstrated by the inadequate outcome of COP-15 which hardly referenced biodiversity impacts or the key role that natural systems have to play in keeping us this side of runaway climate change. However, our zoo community is uniquely placed to play a key role in meeting this challenge with our extensive public reach combined with the technical developments realised over the last couple of years which makes us a powerful force working to avoid catastrophic climate change, while there is yet time."

The Task Force will generate regional, national and institutional ideas and projects so that everyone in the zoo community who wants to act can do so in concert with others and thereby strengthen our work. Paul has recommended this biodiversity and climate change database ([www.bioclimate.org](http://www.bioclimate.org)) or Bioclimate which has thousands of relevant references. Also recommended the book 'Storms of my Grandchildren' James Hansen's book, an authoritative briefing on the urgency of the situation.