

Presentation of the Ulysses S. Seal Award for Innovation in Conservation to William G. Conway

Prague, 2 October 2011

"Ulysses S. Seal's great passion and talent was his creative thinking about how new science could be most effectively applied to solving the problems of wildlife conservation. His contributions were amplified many times over by his further ability to recognize, encourage, and utilize others who also were making such innovative contributions. The CBSG has chosen to honor Ulie by creating the Ulysses S. Seal Award for Innovation in Conservation." Nominations are solicited from CBSG membership, as well as from SSC and others.

It is impossible to summarize in this short message all that makes Bill Conway such a notable recipient of this award, and almost as hard to be as eloquent as spokesperson for the CBSG and Ulie as Bill always has been for conservation. Given his stature in the world of zoos and wildlife conservation, it is interesting to note that Bill actually started his career in the world of zoos as a volunteer keeper in the reptile department at the St. Louis Zoo. He moved up through the ranks of keeper, curator, assistant to the director, and then General Director and President of the Wildlife Conservation Society until he retired in 1999. "Retired" is a relative term, and Bill has been no less active and influential in retirement – as evidenced in his ongoing field work in Argentina, his continued guidance to CBSG, and his unrelenting passion as a spokesperson for wildlife and for doing the right things for wildlife.

The list of professional committees and organizations he has led fill many pages, but several stand out in their relevancy to the work of the CBSG. He founded the AZA's SSP Committee and worked with Ulie Seal, Tom Foose, and others to get the AZA to embrace the responsibility for joint, scientific management of irreplaceable populations. Bill Conway also founded the AZA's Field Conservation Committee, helped to write its first Field Conservation Manual, and he led the profession toward recognizing that species conservation, even as practiced by zoos, must include integrated approaches that combine responsible management of assurance populations, protection of remaining wild populations, scientific study, and inspiration and education of the general public. Along these lines, he has recently challenged us to think about how isolated populations in the wild need the same kinds of careful management as the *ex situ* populations in our more obviously direct care.

In promoting collective, integrated, scientific conservation of populations, Bill also has been an early and ongoing champion of ISIS and shared data, and a passionate advocate for CBSG and shared work on the behalf of species. He serves as a Fellow of the St. Louis WildCare Institute, an example of the use of the expertise within a zoo to achieve conservation also in the field, and he has provided excellent advice to many other conservation programs, either in a formal role as an advisor or just as a friendly and thoughtful message.

Bill Conway also never stopped thinking about how zoo exhibits could serve conservation as well as entertainment and recreation. His early signature paper "How to Exhibit a Bull Frog" is still a classic today. Bill recently wrote an update of that classic paper, in which he points out how

much more than just exhibit zoos could do to save species. He said: "How is it that zoos spend so much effort on exhibits of animals vanishing in nature but so little to assure that they don't vanish—even in the zoo?" Fortunately Bill Conway has often identified the directions that we need to go to develop the approaches and methods to be sure that species don't vanish on our watch. As a true leader in the multifaceted field of zoo and conservation biology, Bill raised the bar many times over for all zoo professionals as to what we should and could accomplish whether it be in exhibit design, conservation education, field conservation, or the synergistic intertwining of all of these.

For the past 5 decades, Bill Conway has been publishing important papers that guided the way for zoos and aquariums to be effective in species conservation. Bill's insights were so far ahead of his time that many of his influential papers were presented even before there was a CBSG. He was a key collaborator with such other notable colleagues as George Rabb, Ulie Seal, Tom Foose, Nate Flesness, and many more. His revolutionary impact on zoos and their role in wildlife conservation paved the way for other innovative thinkers such as Dr. Ulysses S. Seal."

Bill Conway has already been given every other conservation award, including:

- AZA's R. Marlin Perkins Award
- WWF Commander of the Order of the Golden Ark
- Society for Conservation Biology Distinguished Achievement Award
- American Association of Museums Medal for Distinguished Service to Museums
- WAZA's Heini Hediger Award
- Audubon Medal
- Henry Shaw Medal of the Missouri Botanical Garden
- IUCN SSC's highest award – Sir Peter Scott Award for Conservation Merit
- Honorary Doctor of Science degrees from St. Lawrence University, Fordham University, and Trinity University.

All these awards and many others that Bill has received do not diminish the importance of the Seal Award to Bill, or the importance to us of presenting the award to Bill. The qualifications for the award state: The contributions of a nominee need not have been through work connected with the CBSG, but should reflect the CBSG values of creative thinking that results in improved conservation action. Bill has certainly had a huge impact – on zoos, on the SSC, bird conservation, exhibit design, field programs, developing science in zoos, and many more areas of conservation. But his biggest impact has been on all of his colleagues, either directly or indirectly, so it is absolutely appropriate that we present him with our highest award – the Ulysses S. Seal Award for Innovation in Conservation. I know Bill is pleased and proud that we have chosen to honor him, but I also know one thing that we could do that would be an even greater honor to Bill – to push forward to defeat Bill's devil by making the investment not just of funds, but also of time, energy, creativity, and passion, necessary to protect species so that they don't vanish from zoos, from wildlife reserves, or – especially – from their wild habitats.