

Australasian Section of the Society for Conservation Biology

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HELLO to all Australasian section members of SCB and welcome to our second edition of official association with *Pacific Conservation Biology*.

With close affiliation between the journal and the society comes direct benefits to our membership. We have for our use up to four pages per issue to post news items, opinion pieces, requests for assistance, project updates, job notices, or anything else you wish to communicate with the Australasian membership. This is *your* forum, noticeboard, and soapbox. Take advantage of it, and use it to its fullest extent.

If you have any items you wish to communicate, please send them to SCB-A Secretary, Karen Firestone at kfirestone@zoo.nsw.gov.au or PO Box 20, Mosman, NSW 2088.

SCB-Australasia Section News:

New Board Members:

Section elections were finalized in mid-April and we would like to heartily welcome two new Board members Nicola Nelson and Tish Silberbauer and returning Board members Rob Davis and Marc Hero. We also welcome two *ex officio* Board members: Harry Recher, editor of *Pacific Conservation Biology*, and Dick Frankham. With many thanks to our outgoing members, Angie Penn, Meg Montgomery, and Eric Dorfman for their invaluable help in the challenging stages of starting up the Australasian section from scratch.

Please feel free to contact your board members about any issues that you feel are important. The current Board is:

Rob Davis, adavis@cyllene.uwa.edu.au, programmes committee. Karen Firestone, kfirestone@zoo.nsw.gov.au, secretary/treasurer. Richard Frankham, rfrankha@rna.bio.mq.edu.au, *ex officio* member. Caroline Gross, cgross@metz.une.edu.au, nominations committee. Jean-Marc Hero, M.Hero@griffith.edu.au, education committee. Menna Jones, menna.jones@utas.edu.au, acting president/student awards. Andy Mack, amack@global.net.pg, conservation committee. Nicola Nelson, Nicola.Nelson@vuw.ac.nz, communications committee. Harry Recher, hjrecher@pacific.net.au, *ex officio* member, *PCB* editor. Tish Silberbauer, tsilberb@bio.mq.edu.au.

SCB Annual Conference:

The 18th Annual Meeting of the Society for Conservation Biology was held at Columbia University in New York City from July 30 to August 2, 2004. The meeting was hosted by CERC, The Center for Environmental Research and Conservation, a consortium of five New York City research and education organizations: Columbia University, the American Museum of Natural History, The New York

Botanical Garden, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Wildlife Trust. It attracted over 1600 delegates from all parts of the world, including a sizeable Australasian contingent and a number of Australasian students. The theme of the 2004 meeting was "Conservation In An Urbanizing World" referring broadly to expanding human populations and human impacts on the landscape, a very appropriate theme given the location.

While the theme of the meeting was conservation in an urbanizing world, is perhaps less of an issue in the Australasian region than some others, nonetheless the increasingly international scope of the SCB was evident. The Australasian section was well represented in the meetings. Thirty-eight papers presented had Australian authors, six from Papua New Guinea, five from Hawaii and two from New Zealand. Clearly there is need to improve representation from the Pacific Islands, which face dire conservation issues, though not necessarily due to urbanization. Efforts are well underway by SCB and the next year's hosts in Brazil to increase funds available for international travel support, especially by students. Plan ahead, get good abstracts prepared, and get in the queue early for travel support! A lot depends on the quality of the submitted abstract for receipt of travel support.

There was an exciting line-up of plenary speakers, symposia and workshops, covering a broad range of topics, including urban ecology and expansion, sustainable water management, conservation priorities and incorporating ecological effectiveness in conservation policy, biotechnology, conservation partnerships, and urbanization and emerging wildlife diseases. Students were well catered for with workshops on publication skills run by the editors of the SCB journals, drinks with the Board of Governors, and a networking lunch with specialists from topic areas.

The annual SCB conference is a terrific, friendly and fun way to catch up with cutting edge ideas and happenings in international conservation. To promote the catch phrase adopted by the 2005 conference organizing committee: "See you in Brazil" next year. San Jose, California, was voted as the conference location for 2006.

Student Papers at SCB

Three Australasians, Sarah Bekessy, Andrew Mack, and Rodney van der Ree sat on the panel to judge awards for student papers. Three students from our region made the short list of less than twenty finalists and one Australian student, Tara Martin, from the Ecology Centre at the University of Queensland was the first place winner in the student awards at SCB in New York for her paper entitled: "Do experts know anything about birds and grazing? A Bayesian approach using expert opinion". This is a major achievement at

the largest ever SCB meeting, and hearty congratulations go out to Tara.

Inherit and Conserve

The new programme at the SCB called "Inherit and Conserve" was a great success. In this programme, SCB matches conservationists who have equipment, journals, or other assets they wish to donate with recipients in poorer nations who can use the donations. As people often travel light to meetings, donors can bring their materials to the conference and SCB matches them up with recipients who carry them home. By carrying things as checked baggage, this transfer can occur with no shipping charges. SCB is particularly interested in institutional recipients. For example in this meeting runs of several journals went to institutions in nations like Uzbekistan. Details can be found on the SCB web site. Based on this early success, we hope to expand the programme next year.

SCB-2007 Bid

SCB-A is preparing to submit a bid for hosting the SCB annual meeting in New Zealand in 2007. SCB is committed to broadening the international scope of its activities and membership. One way to do this is by holding every other annual meeting outside of North America, even though currently the broad majority of its members are from North America. The competition to host the meeting is stiff and the SCB board has difficulties making this decision. One key to winning the decision is the participation and enthusiasm of the Section to host the meeting. So if you would like to see SCB hosted in our region, please volunteer to assist by contacting Nicola Nelson Nicola.Nelson@vuw.ac.nz.

Hosting such a large international conference in our region will help showcase the excellent conservation science going on in the region and bring together a global spectrum of conservationists who will share their experiences with regional conservationists. If the meetings are held in New Zealand, travel costs should be much more affordable for most in our region, which is the main obstacle keeping many in our region from attending most SCB meetings.

Other Conferences:

This year SCB-Australasia is supporting two conferences within the region: the 6th New Guinea Biology Conference and the XXII International Congress of Entomology.

Due to the great success of the 5th New Guinea Biology Conference last year, the Australasian section has decided to continue support for this conference again this year. This year's conference is being held from 7-9 October 2004 at The University of Papua, Manokwari Campus in West Papua, with the theme of "Biological Conservation through Research and

Conservation through Research and Education." Further information can be sought from the organizers at biocon2004@yahoo.com. The Australasian section is contributing funds to help students get to the conference and in providing student awards for presentations given. SCB support for conferences like this not only helps to foster conservation biology within our region but also helps to forge bridges between sometimes isolated conservation biologists. Last year's student prize winners were so pleased and honoured to be recognized. Our small contribution really makes a direct impact on these students.

SCB-Australasia also supported the XXII International Congress of Entomology. This conference was held at the Brisbane Convention Centre in Queensland, Australia from August 15 to 21, 2004. The conference, with its theme of "Strength in Diversity" and over 19 sections and symposia was huge. More details will follow in the next issue of *PCB*.

Membership update:

Australasian section membership currently stands at 341 members which is broken down to about 50% within our region including Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and the Pacific Islands (this also includes Hawaii and Guam) and 50% from other countries outside our region. As we are one of the smallest sections, it is imperative that we increase our membership to reach a critical mass.

We are calling on all members within the region to help in recruiting new members. Perhaps you work with colleagues who don't yet know about SCB? Perhaps you have some students you would like to support? With basic membership fees of only \$10 (US), providing quarterly newsletters, access to a vast network of conservation biologists, opportunity to lodge News and Views items in *PCB*, and big discounts on the SCB annual conference fees, this is a true bargain. (Of course, other membership options come with subscriptions to the various journals that SCB has: *Conservation Biology*, *Conservation in Practice*, and obviously *Pacific Conservation Biology*.)

Are you attending upcoming local or international conferences within Australasia this year? You can help by placing brochures and other promotional materials out for prospective members. Departmental notice boards, staff rooms, and the like are also crying out for pamphlets! We will gladly send out brochures, promotional copies of the journals, SCB-Australasia promotional posters, etc. Please help support your society and ask for some promotional materials to be sent to you.

Australasian Section Board of Director's Meeting:

Planning for the Australasian Section's annual board meeting is taking shape nicely. The meeting will be held over two days, September 2 to 3 at Taronga Zoo in Sydney. The generous assistance of the Christensen Fund enables all our board members to meet for the first face to face

meeting since the Ecological Society of Australia meeting in Cairns in December of 2002. This meeting will give us the opportunity to strategically plan for the next few years for the section's activities and focus on building the Australasian section up to its full potential. As this edition of the journal goes to press, the meeting will have already taken place. The Board will provide updates in the next edition of the journal. Please feel free to contact any of the board members if you have ideas or suggestions for how you would like to see the section develop.

VIEWPOINT: Tasmanian Forestry and Conservation Biology

"I'm a naturalist, a conservation biologist, and I work in the Tasmanian forestry industry". That confession was my opening line for an essay I wrote last year in the *Tasmanian Naturalist*, entitled *"Why would a naturalist work in the Tasmanian forestry industry?"* Its publication was met with silence. Had I said something offensive? Was I so far off track there was no point in engaging with me? Or were the good people of Tasmania just plain bored with the whole debate? At the time, Tasmanian forestry was a hot topic in the Tasmanian media, but probably wasn't making that much of an impact interstate. As federal election time looms, its profile has been growing. Since so many other people seem to be expressing their opinions on Tasmanian forestry (for example WWF; the Wilderness Society; the Australian Conservation Foundation; the Tasmanian Conservation Trust; eminent independent geologists with a particular interest in hydrology; oyster growers and consultant marine biologists; a group of concerned and eminent Australian conservation biologists; Liberal senators; recently recruited Labor MPs; award-winning fiction authors; and now even the ESA email list) I thought I'd pen a few words too. Of course, my words shouldn't be trusted because, though I work as a conservation biologist, I work for Forestry Tasmania. But for what they're worth, here goes. I'll confine myself to discussing some Tasmanian forestry myths that one hears again and again. There are dozens of these out there, but I'll stick to five for starters.

Myth number 1. Forestry is land-clearing. Converting native forests to plantations could legitimately be viewed as ecologically akin to land-clearing. There has been a lot of conversion in Tasmania in the past few years — one of the consequences of the Regional Forest Agreement. It's the down side of the deal that saw increased forest reservation and the development of a "comprehensive, adequate and representative" forest reserve system. Those three words that make up the CAR acronym all represent value judgements, and conservation biologists have a legitimate role in debating what their values should be. But the main point here is about land-clearing. Land-clearing obliterates biodiversity and radically alters ecological processes. But harvesting native forest as part of a silvicultural cycle, one which sees the native forest regrow, is not land-clearing. It is harvesting, it is felling, it is cutting down

trees. Some people don't accept that civilized societies should do this sort of thing to their native forests — not in their backyards anyway. I say that civilized societies SHOULD be doing this in their own backyards, if the alternative is to pay someone else (in Indonesia, PNG or the Solomon Islands, for instance) to do it to their native forests instead. Let's not forget that Australia is a net importer of timber. Developing countries, though they need the timber revenue more than we do, generally lack of the sort of checks and balances that we have in Australian forestry. I've worked in the forestry sector in Indonesia. As a conservation biologist, I know where I'd rather my forest products came from. If none of us used the products of this harvest, then we wouldn't need to harvest forests. But what sort of society would that be? I don't think we yet live in a paperless society, let alone a timberless one. Can't we get all these products from plantations? Well, maybe, in the future — but our supplies aren't yet meeting demand, and won't do for many years — even if demand somehow stops growing. It's not even clear yet whether plantations will be able to supply some of the products we currently get from native forests. Pulp — no problem. Sawlogs? Maybe. And only if the plantations don't succumb to pests, diseases, stem decay, nutrient deficiencies, fire, drought or windthrow in the mean time. Oh, and as long as people don't mind having plantations in their backyards. Oh, and as long as there's enough water to go round. And as long as the costs of management can be kept in check relative to the price people are prepared to pay for the products.

Myth number 2. If we put something in a reserve, it's safe. It's safe from the depredations of loggers, maybe. But other depredations can be just as stressful for the ecosystem. Think of *Phytophthora*, think of blackberries. It's not enough to create paper parks any more. They need managing, and that needs money. Governments don't seem that interested in finding funds to manage the existing network of reserves these days. Most parks can't pay their way. Tasmanian State forests pay their way, and contribute money to State coffers too (to be spent on reserves maybe? It would be nice to think so). With some notable exceptions, I would prefer to hear more calls for greater funding for existing parks before we try and offload much more forest land on the managers of the reserve networks. It's not as though State forests are entirely dedicated to timber production either. There is room for argument about the relative dominance of production over protection (bearing in mind that less production will probably mean less revenue, and more protection should entail more expenditure on conservation management), but I think it's time we developed more sophisticated arguments. Things aren't as black and white as *"reserve good, forestry coupes bad"*. This isn't classical MacArthurian island biogeography. Much of nature does very well in the "matrix" and doesn't care about reserves. The matrix generally includes a smattering of reserved forest, reasonably

well connected (for the subset of species that wish to take advantage of this connectivity) as riparian strips, wildlife habitat strips and biodiversity corridors. Of course some species do care about big reserves, and those are the ones we need big and strategically placed reserves for. If they're not being adequately reserved, we should certainly have more reserves — and manage them accordingly.

Myth number 3. *Oldgrowth forests are special reservoirs of biodiversity, so all remaining ones should be left alone.* Yes, oldgrowth forests harbour species that younger forests don't have (and *vice versa*). So we must make sure we protect some of them. But every last bit? Call me a heretic, but that strikes me as a bit of a luxury — the icing on the cake once we've got every other more pressing conservation issue sorted (and there are plenty of them, even in Tasmania — most of them nothing to do with forests). It's the sort of argument that would clearly hold in parts of the world where old growth forests are a rarity and younger forests predominate. But for most forest types in Tasmania, that's not the case. In Tasmania we can have our "cake" (old growth reserves) and eat it (harvest some old growth) — though admittedly it may lack icing and may leave a nasty taste in the mouth for some.

Myth number 4. *Pre-European forests were all old growth.* Try telling that to the Aborigines whose ancestors tended the forests with firestick farming. Even in the absence of humans, not all forests would be old growth at any one point in time. Well, they might be, but it's an unlikely scenario given their flammability. More likely they would have been a mosaic of age-classes, from young regrowth through to rainforest. The concept of old growth doesn't sit that comfortably with me anyway, when we're talking wet eucalypt forests. These forests are successional communities on their way to becoming rainforests (which lack the grandeur of tall eucalypt forest but are ecologically more mature). In other parts of the world, the term old growth is applied to climax forest. Wet eucalypt forests are a plagioclimax — sometimes natural, sometimes human-induced. The drier the climate, the less likely they are to remain wildfire-free long enough to become rainforest. Should we be seeking to preserve old growth, or the processes that allow the development and regeneration of regrowth, old growth and rainforest in whatever mix nature finds appropriate at the time?

Myth number 5. *If we insist on harvesting timber from our wet eucalypt forests, we should go back to the good old days of selective logging.* Nice idea, taken straight from some other part of the world where selective logging sort of works. But it never worked in Tasmanian wet eucalypt forest, even in the old days. If we're into the sort of forestry that could be described as "take the best and leave the rest", then selective logging is a good way to do it. But once you run out of the best, the easiest option is to move on and exploit another bit. That's what they did in the old days. Sustainable forestry? I don't think so. In a way it's

fortuitous that the cavalier attitude of the early loggers apparently extended to their handling of fire. Had the selectively logged forests not burned, we might not have such luxuriant regrowth today (we might have had more rainforest instead). Some trees thrive on selective logging — many rainforest trees, for instance, where the small gap created is just the right size for a new crop of shade-tolerant seedlings. But it just doesn't work for wet forest eucalypts, which like much bigger gaps of the sort that you get after major wildfires or patch-felling. If you could keep the fires out, then selective logging could be quite a good way of converting a mixed wet eucalypt forest to rainforest — but that's not normally the intention.

So where does this leave us? It leaves us with plenty of legitimate concerns about forestry that science cannot address, but quite a few that it can. For me, it opens up a wealth of possibilities for exploring ways of doing forestry that better achieve the key conservation objectives: maintaining ecosystem function, maintaining ecosystem processes and sustaining the biodiversity that binds the ecosystem together. But it means accepting a role for forestry in our native forest landscapes, and accepting that we live in a global economy where local autonomy is well nigh impossible. It's not what a conservation biologist would have prescribed for the world if we'd had the luxury of starting from scratch, but it's the world in which we find ourselves. We'd better just try and make the best of a bad job. It's tough, but somebody's got to do it!

If anyone would like a copy of the *Tasmanian Naturalist* article that I referred to, please let me know.

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SCHOLARSHIPS, JOBS, ETC.

Graduate Research Assistant in Insect Conservation, Ecology and Systematics

Period: To begin approximately January 10, 2005, for 1 year. Renewable annually for up to 3 years, contingent upon progress and availability of funds.

Duties: Assist in the assessment of the impacts of biological control introductions on non-target endemic moths in Hawaii; including assisting with the development of rigorous quantitative field experiments to determine impact of introduced parasitoids. Will be responsible for designing and conducting laboratory experiments, field trials, and other field work, on several of the Hawaiian islands in both agricultural and native forest environments.

Minimum Qualifications: Bachelor's degree in a biological science from an accredited university or college. Able to perform field work in rough terrain. Must be accepted in the Entomology Graduate Programme (MS or PhD) at the University of Hawaii, Manoa.

Minimum Salary: \$15,558 per year MS, \$16,824 per year PhD, plus benefits and tuition waiver.

To Apply: Send letter of application and names and contact information for 3 academic references to Dr. Daniel Rubinoff, Department of Plant and Environmental Protection Sciences,

University of Hawaii at Manoa, 3050 Maile Way, Gilmore 310, Honolulu, HI 96822; or by email to rubinoff@hawaii.edu

Closing Date: October 31, 2004

2 x Ph. D. positions (ARC Australian Postgraduate Awards-Industry)

Conserving our Carnivores: the application of molecular genetics to the conservation management of quolls

The University of New South Wales, in conjunction with its research partners (NSW Department of Environment and Conservation, Vic Department of Sustainability and Environment, WA Department of Conservation and Land Management, NT Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment, Environment ACT, TAS Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, and the Zoological Parks Board of New South Wales) is seeking two PhD students in molecular ecology, population genetics and forensic identification of quolls.

Quolls, the largest native marsupial predators on mainland Australia, occupy a pivotal ecological niche. All species are declining and are threatened by a variety of interacting environmental processes. This programme brings together seven wildlife agencies in a nationwide partnership for understanding and protecting quolls. We will provide new genetic data to test current population and conservation theories using four species of quolls as model taxa to inform us about past histories of populations and to measure parameters of importance to on-ground managers. Results of these projects will help guide management practices for both short- and long-term conservation of these species.

Both scholarships offer an annual tax-free stipend of \$23,294, relocation and thesis production expenses, and ample field work in spectacular but remote and rugged regions. These positions are available from July 2004. Applicants must be permanent residents in Australia or Australian/NZ citizens and should hold a first class honours degree, or equivalent qualification in a discipline such as molecular ecology, conservation genetics, ecology or a related field. Interested applicants should submit a cover letter with a detailed CV (including two referees) to Dr Karen Firestone, Zoological Parks Board of New South Wales, PO Box 20, Mosman, NSW 2088. Applications will be accepted until the positions are filled. Further details and enquiries should be directed to kfirestone@zoo.nsw.gov.au or phone (02) 9978 4608.

¹Secretary, Society for Conservation Biology