

## EDITORIAL

being made for employment of excombatants in park restoration and community projects. The best outcome for the park and the people who live nearby would be the successful integration of humanitarian relief work, post-conflict reconciliation, and the restoration of the park and its conservation, development and educational activities. Fauna & Flora International is working together with SRNCL and friends of Liberia from around the world to help Liberian conservationists to secure the funds and assistance they need. Providing the outcome of the elections leads to a favourable environment for conservation activity, FFI will be seeking to carry out further research, conservation and capacity-building work in this neglected country.

*Mike Appleton, FFI's Conservation Development Unit, and Jacqui Morris, Editor*

*Mike Appleton visited Liberia in April this year and is co-ordinating FFI's support for conservation in Liberia. This issue of Oryx includes an appeal for support for this programme.*

## Farewell to Gary Meffe

We are sorry to have to say farewell to Gary Meffe, who is taking up a new post as editor of *Conservation Biology*. We thank him for his thought-provoking contributions to *Oryx* over the last two-and-a-half years and wish him success in his new challenge.

In future issues we plan to feature a series of guest editorials from other conservationists in various parts of the world.

*Jacqui Morris, Editor*

## SAVANNAH PERSPECTIVE

### Challenges

*Gary K. Meffe*

The world of the conservation biologist is nothing if not challenging. Continually limited funding, a depressing litany of habitat and species losses, a burgeoning human population that does not seem to grasp the relevance or depth of our problems, and a complex natural world with few easy and clear answers are just a few of the challenges that we face daily. Despite that, we continue on, confident in the knowledge that we are doing the right thing and hopeful that the global situation will improve with our help. We have little choice but to forge ahead if we truly believe that what we are doing is correct and necessary, so we persevere against ever-mounting odds.

But challenges need not be discouraging; on the contrary, they can be positive experiences, providing the energy (and sometimes anger) to fuel the engines of progress in conservation, and they certainly can keep things lively and

interesting. At the deepest personal level, challenges help to renew interest, stimulate individuals to new heights and open up new avenues of investigation. In that spirit, I have accepted a new challenge that necessitates bringing 'Savannah Perspective' to a close. This will be my last *Oryx* column, and my new challenge, the Editorship of *Conservation Biology*, will have begun as you read this. I leave *Oryx* with a touch of sadness, with fond memories of the last two-and-a-half years and 10 columns, and with renewed excitement at the many challenges that lie ahead for us all.

Before leaving you, I want to convey a few recent and critical challenges being met right now by conservation biologists in the USA. The US Endangered Species Act, called by Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt 'the most visionary piece of environmental legislation' in the world, continues to come under attack by those who do not fundamentally appreciate either their place in Nature or the role of functioning ecosystems in their personal welfare. The Act is due (actually long overdue) to be reauthorized, and draft revisions of the legislation are being circulated by

Congress at this time. Conservation scientists are becoming engaged in the comment process, and in particular a group from the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) has weighed into the debate.

Dennis Murphy, President of SCB, convened a small group of scientists this spring to produce a concise statement for Congress and the Clinton Administration on provisions of one proposed bill from the US Senate, the Kempthorne–Chaffee bill. The SCB group offered scientific input on several aspects of that bill dealing with conservation on private lands. Our statement has received widespread attention in Washington because of the initiative and interest shown by conservation scientists willing to introduce objective science into the equation. It seems that the statement is being taken seriously at this point, and we are hopeful that informed science can help guide this important policy process.

A related challenge is that dealing with so-called 'Habitat Conservation Plans' (HCPs), a legislative measure that attempts to protect ecosystems and their species while permitting some economic development. HCPs permit some legal destruction of habitat and even 'incidental' loss of endangered species, provided the overall plan secures important habitat and provides protection for native species and their functioning ecosystems. Scientists are again entering the discussion because, although the idea in principle may be a good one (especially where development in crowded regions, such as southern California, is rampant), it has the potential to be carried out very well or very poorly. Injecting rigorous scientific criteria into HCPs will help ensure their success as a conservation tool, but there are many challenges ahead in defining good HCPs. The SCB has begun a critical analysis of HCPs throughout the country in an attempt to assess their use independently.

Another rising policy issue, pervasive throughout environmental programmes and legislation in this country, is the concept of independent scientific review (ISR). Independent scientific reviews are (correctly) being called for by the US Congress in an attempt to bring the best information to bear on environmental

issues. However, ISR is not yet well defined, and we are also attempting to provide input on that issue. When should ISR be used? Who should carry it out? What constitutes 'independence'? What process should be undertaken for ISR? The SCB is now preparing a position statement to address these and other difficult questions related to objective science as a guide to good environmental policy.

So the conservation challenges proceed in a never-ending torrent, and we all continue to respond as best we can. It is easy to become despondent or overwhelmed by it all, to ask whether it is worth it and to wonder whether we can possibly make a difference. Then we take that hike into an old-growth forest, or view the splendour and diversity of an intertidal zone, or see nature through the wondrous eyes of a child, and remember why we do what we do. Our batteries become recharged and we forge ahead. In the final analysis, there is no choice.

When I sometimes despair that we make little difference, I recall a wonderful story told by a friend and colleague, Dennis Schenborn, of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. It goes like this. A fellow is walking along a deserted beach on a beautiful day, and sees, off in the distance, a person running up and down the beach, repeatedly stooping to pick up items and throw them into the water. On getting closer he sees that this woman is frantically picking up starfish and returning them to their home. He asks what she is doing and she says, 'I'm saving these starfish that wash up on the beach. If they stay here they'll dry out and die, so I'm putting them back.' Scoffing a bit with a superior air, the fellow says, 'You must be crazy! There's thousands of starfish along here, and hundreds of miles of beach. You can't possibly make a difference!' Tossing the starfish she was holding back into the water, she confidently says, 'I just made a difference for that one.'

None of us, individually, can make a *huge* difference in the world by what we do. But we each can do *something*, we each can 'save a few starfish'. And collectively, the number of starfish saved begins to mount, and we make

## SAVANNAH PERSPECTIVE

a real difference. I will continue to work and throw back my share of starfish as long as I am able, and I hope you will be out there doing your part. I encourage you to accept and embrace the many challenges that come your way; I know I plan to. See you on the beach.

*Gary Meffe is a Professor at the University of Georgia and the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, and is senior author of Principles of Conservation Biology (Sinauer Associates, 2nd edn, 1997).*

## NEWS AND VIEWS

### Biodiversity and base values – a response

I was surprised by Gary Meffe's perspective, 'Biodiversity and base values', in the April 1997 issue of *Oryx*, in which he agrees with Gretchen Daily's view that conservation biologists too often focus on issues such as biodiversity and fragmentation, while ignoring the human pressures that produce conservation problems. Perhaps this is true of some academic conservation biologists, such as those who attended the meeting he described at Providence, Rhode Island, in August 1996, but it is surely very far from true of most of those who work in international conservation planning and policy-making, including many *Oryx* readers and contributors. Since the publication of the *World Conservation Strategy* by IUCN, UNEP and WWF in 1980, it has become almost a dogma that conservation must go hand-in-hand with the sustainable development of human societies. So faithfully has this approach been followed that it is now not unusual for conservation projects to place more emphasis on satisfying human needs than on protecting wild animals and plants from extinction, as I described in *Oryx*, 29, 115–122.

Ironically, in the same issue as Meffe's perspective, you published Bruce Powell's news from the Niger Delta. Powell notes that in the last few years large numbers of foreign consultants have visited the area on missions to formulate conservation action and that the vast majority of these consultants, spending large sums of money, have focused on human social and economic issues. Very little has been done to improve the protection of the

delta's unique and threatened wildlife, in part because the annual operating budget of the relevant state government department in Nigeria is so meagre. The only project currently on the ground that is endeavouring to protect any part of the extensive delta ecosystem is being conducted by CUNY student Lodewijk Werre who, while studying the endemic red colobus monkey, is working with local people, the state government and oil companies to organize better protection for part of the proposed Apoi Creek Forest Reserve (J. L. Werre and C. B. Powell, *Oryx*, 31, 7–9). Perhaps because efforts aimed primarily at increasing both our knowledge and the protected status of a rare animal are no longer very fashionable activities compared with projects aimed at the development of human communities, Werre has found it difficult to raise funds for his work from international conservation organizations and is therefore struggling to cover even his basic living costs.

My second major disagreement with Gary Meffe's perspective concerns his argument about the importance, in conservation planning, of taking account of human 'base values', as delineated by social scientist Harold Lasswell. These values, said to be those that all people seek to achieve in life and which therefore affect the development of societies and their institutions, are: power, enlightenment, wealth, well-being, skill, affection, respect and rectitude. At an intellectual level, there are some obvious attractions in this model of social processes and in Meffe's view that the satisfaction of all eight values produces personal freedom. And I would not disagree that, provided priority is given to the protection of threatened nature,