

More than 350 British and Russian government officials, representatives of various international organizations, distinguished members of the business community, and media leaders, attended the launch reception.

The concept of the London Initiative was developed by John Massey Stewart, an author and expert on Russia who has written on environmental issues facing Russian society, and was adopted by the Conservation Foundation. Over the past year, the Initiative has been gathering endorsements from a wide variety of national and international organizations, including the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Currently the Conservation Foundation is aspiring to raise £200,000 to run the Initiative

and help specific projects in Russia. Support has already been received from a number of corporate sponsors, including Price Waterhouse, lead sponsor for the launch events, but much more is needed.

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Turning-point for South Africa's St Lucia Wetlands?

Controversy over the future of South Africa's St Lucia wetlands has moved a long step closer to resolution. This large complex of varied habitat types and great biological diversity occupies over 250,000 hectares along the east coast of Natal province. Some 155,000 hectares of the system were designated for the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance in 1986.

Leases for the open-dredge mining of heavy-metals, especially titanium, in the dune areas along the eastern shore of Lake St Lucia have raised the hope of new jobs for the region in the short term but brought the likelihood of serious environmental damage to the entire system. The Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention expressed its concern in 1990 and 1993, calling upon South Africa to retain the site's protected status. In 1992, a Ramsar Monitoring Procedure team studied the site and presented a detailed report, which recommended that the authorities consider whether, in the light of their nation's obligations under the Convention, the application to exercise mining rights should not be refused. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was performed which failed to find reason to fear serious damage from the proposed mining in the sensitive dune areas; however, this report was quickly challenged by concerned conservation organizations.

The Government then appointed an independent five-members' Review Panel of experts to study the reports and make recommendations to guide its decision, and on 10 December 1993 the Panel issued its conclusions. The Panel contradicts the EIA and recommends that 'no mining

should be allowed in the Greater St Lucia area'; it maintains that mining 'would cause unacceptable damage to a place which is special' — one for which 'there is no substitute.' Instead, the Panel urges that the site be given World Heritage status and that its potential for ecotourism be developed for the economic benefit of the local population and as 'a very special asset of the nation.'

The Ramsar Convention Bureau welcomes the Panel's report enthusiastically. Secretary-General Daniel Navid has congratulated the South African Government for 'sending a strong signal to other governments throughout southern Africa; its example, backed by the expertise of its specialists, will allow it to play a leading role in the conservation and wise use of wetlands of the region.' Michael Smart, Assistant Secretary-General, said that the Bureau particularly appreciates the Review Panel's emphasis on 'the urgency of resolving the situation of local people, a concern entirely in line with the Ramsar concept of "wise use" of wetlands.'

The 'Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat', adopted at Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, provides the framework for international cooperation for the conservation of wetland habitats. It now has 80 member states, and there are 644 wetlands around the world included in the Ramsar List.

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Trapnell Fund for Environmental Field Research in Africa

The University of Oxford invites applications for support from the above for field-based research concerned with the African environment. Proposals involving research into the ecological aspects either of soils or of indigenous forests and woodland in the tropical region of Africa may be given preference. Applicants should be graduates of British or African universities who are, or will be, working for a research degree of the University of Oxford or who hold a post-doctoral position at Oxford.

Subject to the availability of funds, the awards made may range from grants for field-work expenses to full postgraduate scholarships. Applications for which partial support has already been raised will be particularly wel-

come. Awards will be available from 1 October 1994. The closing date for receipt of applications is 1 March 1994.

Further particulars may be obtained from the undersigned to whom applications should be sent — or from Dr P.S. Savill, Department of Plant Sciences, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3RA, England, UK.

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