

resources that could and should be mobilized for conservation purposes, but difficulties over intellectual property, communication and perceived competitive advantage have prevented full engagement. In a radical new proposal, BP-Amoco and Rio Tinto are working with UNEP-WCMC to create a public access portal to their environmental datasets. Through demonstrating what might be achieved, these three partners aim to attract other multinational companies to join in.

In many countries of the world, demographic patterns are changing and opportunities for civil society to contribute to environmental monitoring are growing. People are living longer, more active lives and have the potential to make direct observations on the living world around them. Schoolchildren too are interested in monitoring their environment. Database technology tends to channel data providers into tightly controlled and structured systems that are inaccessible to civil society. At UNEP-WCMC, we are seeking support from foundations to help us turn this paradigm on its head, to enable us to welcome new data from any source and in any form. The challenge is in 'managing the chaos' and in finding ways to sustain quality, but the benefit will be a highly motivated army of eyes and ears for conservation.

Harmonizing official data

Since the 1970s, nations world-wide have signed up to treaties to conserve biodiversity. Conventions on trade in endangered species, on migratory species, wetlands, World Heritage sites, regional seas, as well as European and other regional directives of various kinds, all require official reports on biodiversity and its components. The effort is huge, but the benefits are not. By looking at reporting needs in the round, UNEP-WCMC is promoting a 'modular' approach that would allow thematic reports to serve many different purposes. For example, detailed reports on protected areas prepared at the national level once every couple of years could serve World Heritage, Ramsar, Regional Seas and many other purposes. Saving on duplication would allow more resources to go to where they are

really needed, in the assessment of biodiversity and in taking direct conservation action.

In conclusion, our knowledge about the living world is sufficient to know that we are losing it, and fast, but is inadequate to ensure that the actions we take in mitigation are focused and effective. We must recognize, and tap into, new sources of relevant data. Making use of Internet technology, engaging people in all walks of life, and taking common-sense steps to maximize the effectiveness of the official assessment and early warning programmes will all help to improve the prospects for the living world upon which we all ultimately depend.

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At a ceremony at Cambridge on 3 July 2000, Dr Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), announced that the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) had joined UNEP as its world biodiversity information and assessment centre. The Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP, Minister for Environment, and Peter Hain, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, explained that this development had the full support of the UK Government, as well as the encouragement of WCMC's former partners, IUCN and WWF. WCMC will work closely with UNEP's Division of Environmental Information Assessment and Early Warning, and Division of Environmental Conventions, headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, as well as the UNEP Regional Offices and networks. This union will not only strengthen the Centre's work in providing global information services on biodiversity, but will also enhance its efforts to build the capacity of nations around the world in implementing multilateral environment agreements.

Reference

Groombridge, B. & Jenkins, M.D. (2000) *Global Biodiversity: Earth's Living Resources in the 21st Century*. World Conservation Press, Cambridge, UK.

Note: This publication will be reviewed in the October 2000 issue of *Oryx*.

Letter from the editor

I would like to introduce myself as the new Editor of *Oryx*—*The International Journal of Conservation*. Dr Jacqui Morris stepped down as Editor of the journal at the end of 1999, after 18 years in the post. Her contribution and commitment over that time was invaluable and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for all that she

has done for the journal. It is a great honour and privilege to have been appointed as editor of *Oryx*.

Over the next few months, I will be working closely with the team of senior editors to review the content and focus of *Oryx* and to plan for its future development. Details of any changes will be notified in forthcoming issues of the journal. I also intend to publish an annual editor's report in the January issue of *Oryx*; this report will not only

highlight any changes to the content of the journal, but will also report on the number of papers submitted in the previous year, the acceptance (or rejection) rate, the balance of papers and other issues relating to the content.

I look forward very much to working with authors, reviewers, the journal's editorial team and Blackwell Science Ltd. to maintain the high scientific standards of

Oryx and to develop it further in the twenty-first century. Please contact me at the Fauna & Flora International (FFI) office if you have any comments or queries relating to the journal. Alternatively, contact me via e-mail at camillaffi@talk21.com

Camilla Erskine