

Emergency appeal for Liberia—an update

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and the staff of the Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL), in particular its president, Alexander Peal, would like to extend their sincerest thanks to those of you who so generously responded to the emergency appeal for supporting conservation in Liberia (see July 1997 issue of *Oryx*). Without your support, little of what follows would have been possible.

The money raised from the *Oryx* appeal came at a critical moment for conservation in Liberia. With the return of civil stability but its economy in shambles, Liberia is turning its attention to rehabilitation of its wrecked infrastructure, resettlement of displaced persons, its desperate financial situation and development of its resources. Among Liberia's principal resources are its forests and wildlife. Logging and hunting pressures are currently very high, but unfortunately the Liberian Forestry Development Authority (FDA) has little capacity to enforce the country's forest and wildlife management guidelines. Likewise, conservation does not rank highly on the new government's list of priorities and there are few local voices in support of conservation.

The *Oryx* appeal raised £3473. Although a small amount in relative terms, it has been used to catalyse the restarting of conservation activities in Liberia and thus is leveraging far-reaching conservation benefits. A portion of this money was used to pay unpaid basic salaries of key conservation staff in order that they continue at their jobs where they had been unpaid for many months. Another portion of it has been used to support Alexander Peal to return to Liberia in August of 1998 to reassume duties as president of the Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia, Liberia's only effective local NGO dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity. Mr Peal founded this organization and is one of the few Liberian advocates of conservation. Prior to the civil war, he was the head of the FDA's Division of National Parks and Wildlife and was personally responsible for creation of Liberia's only national park, Sapo National Park. He is well connected and respected in Liberia and internationally in government, diplomatic, conservation-related and private-sector circles.

With his return to Liberia, Mr Peal has been able to manage the many small-scale grants for SCNL that he, FFI and other partners have been able to raise, including preparation of a status report for Sapo National Park and fielding of additional staff there, follow-up on an extensive survey of community development needs and potential surrounding Sapo National Park, survey work and conservation planning of the Cestos-Senkwehn rivershed area in the south-eastern coastal

zone, a national-level symposium on conservation priorities and planning, public awareness in Monrovia, and rehabilitation of the animal orphanage at Monrovia Zoo. The society's activities should continue to increase in momentum with Mr Peal in Monrovia, and already many more projects are under development or have been submitted to donors.

Mr Peal has embarked on several initiatives with a view to restarting far-reaching conservation activities, too. He has restructured SCNL and created an Advisory Council and a Board of Directors, drawing their members from influential levels in the private, business and diplomatic sectors of Monrovia. This will permit the organization to handle the present and future (increased) workloads, and to give it entrée into and support from powerful circles in Liberian society. He has assisted the government to prepare to ratify the Convention on Biological Diversity, which is expected to occur in late 1998 or early 1999. Several major donors have expressed interest in mobilizing GEF resources once the Convention is ratified. Through Peal, SCNL has become again an active lobbying force, insisting that the government enforce its hunting, forestry and mining regulations, and it is participating in the re-drafting of the new wildlife use regulation. Peal has organized a national symposium for government officials on natural-resource use in order that they understand the principles of conservation and sustainable use.

The future of Liberia's forests is far from secure but thanks to your generosity the first steps are now being taken to make conservation an element of Liberia's post-war reconstruction efforts. The SCNL continues to operate in a hand-to-mouth manner and further contributions, either financial or material (especially field equipment, motorbikes or a 4-wheel-drive vehicle), are still desperately needed. Please send contributions to Fauna & Flora International, Liberia Programme, Great Eastern House, Tenison Road, Cambridge CB1 2DT, UK. For material donations, please contact Jamison Suter, FFI's Co-ordinator of Africa Programmes.

Whither IUCN's Sustainable Use initiative?

Few are the issues of *Oryx* that do not contain peer-reviewed articles or debate about the sustainable, or unsustainable, use of wildlife. The implications of the bushmeat trade, in particular, are coming into focus (see the penetrating article on the Okapi National Park in the April 1998 issue). It is therefore a good moment to take stock of IUCN's current attempt to grapple systematically with this contentious subject.

The background is that after a resolution at the Perth General Assembly (GA) of IUCN in 1990 had given cautious endorsement to sustainable use as consistent with conservation, subject to guidelines to be devised, the draft guidelines produced by the then Sustainable Use Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) were not accepted by the Buenos Aires GA in 1994. Following this meeting the Director General and the Chair of SSC set up an Advisory Group consisting of Marshal Murphree (Zimbabwe), John Robinson (USA), David Brackett (Canada) and George Rabb (USA, as SSC Chair). This group proposed the launch of a new Sustainable Use Initiative within SSC with two key features. It was to be analytical in approach, examining uses that enhance sustainability, and regionally devolved around the globe. Less unusually, it was largely to find its own funds. In this process the search for guidelines was put on ice, temporarily or otherwise.

With a small Global Support Team (GST) in Washington, under Steve Edwards, the SUI was launched in 1995 and the first regional groups, in Africa, formed. By the time of the Montreal 1st World Conservation Congress (WCC) in 1996, which fully endorsed the approach being taken, there were 10 such groups. There are now 14, involving several hundred individual members, and significant funding has been found from NORAD and the Ford Foundation to enable the developing regional groups to be launched and begin to function, as well as to support the GST and Chairman, Marshall Murphree. Although under the SSC umbrella, Regional Sustainable Use Specialist Groups (RSUSGs) operate differently from typical SSC Specialist Groups insofar as they elect their own chairmen, and committees if they wish, and have considerable freedom in the way they operate and the products they issue. Most have their own part-time staff, either from IUCN regional offices or independently recruited. The Chairmen of the RSUSGs are members of the Global SUSG Steering Committee, into which the former Advisory Group has now been incorporated as an Executive.

Not unnaturally, there are big differences between the styles and success so far of the individual RSUSGs. Each is attempting to look at uses of wild living resources in its region to see how they can be more sustainable. In doing so they adopt a multidisciplinary approach in which economic and social, as well as biological, factors are assessed. The West African group has held a workshop on the wildlife trade in its region, focusing on CITES implementation. The musical play, *Guardians of Eden*, sponsored by the Southern African SUSG and shown in Europe and North America, as

well as Africa, encapsulated sustainable-use principles in dramatic form. If not analytical, it was hugely enjoyable. The European SUSG, with 80 members from 27 countries, is alone in forming thematic transnational subgroups on agriculture, fisheries, tourism and forestry as well as on the use of wild fauna. The first two groups have opened up a dialogue with the relevant Directorate-Generals of the European Commission and produced substantial analytical papers and commentaries on current policy proposals.

At the global level, the SUSG Steering Committee and GST sponsored a major workshop at the Montreal WCC, whose papers have now been published by IUCN under the title *Enhancing Sustainability*. The overview contributions by Robinson and Murphree are particularly interesting, alongside the case studies. Papers given at a similar workshop at the Bratislava Global Biodiversity Forum in May 1998 on the role of tenure on increasing sustainability of use are being prepared for the same series. Apart from its role in co-ordinating the regional network of groups, without regimenting it, the Steering Committee has devoted considerable effort to the requirement of the Montreal Congress for it to produce a short policy statement on sustainable use for consideration by IUCN members at the next Congress in 2000. The SSC Steering Committee, meeting in Manaus this June, endorsed the latest version of the draft statement, with a small addition, and it is to be hoped that it will achieve a consensus among the majority of the IUCN membership.

Subject to the perennial problems of finding or renewing funding, the global SUI and its devolved realization through the RSUSGs seem to be gaining in confidence and coherence. This was certainly the experience at the recent Steering Committee held in Antigua, Guatemala, where decisions were taken to make planned and structured inputs to the various elements of the Convention on Biological Diversity and of CITES as well as to the next WCC, to develop a technical advisory mechanism to bring together, at a scientific and policy level, key products from the RSUSGs, and to produce an internal and external communications strategy. Because the SUI is truly a bottom-up operation, even though it has a heavyweight top, the ride can be somewhat rough at times. It is still too early to predict the outcome, but there is a distinct possibility that in the end it will generate more light than heat. I would not, though, put too much money on the guidelines ever reappearing.

Robin Sharp
Chair, European Sustainable Use Specialist Group