



# The Learning Experience

THE IUCN COMMISSION ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION (IUCN CEC) IS A NETWORK THAT YOU NEED, AND THAT ZOOS NEED. IT ALSO NEEDS YOU

Malcolm Whitehead, CEPA specialist and author, is a member of the IUCN CEC and has held senior education posts at Twycross Zoo, WWT and ZSL

Happy new year. Godt nytar. Gelukkig nieuwjaar. Head uut aastat. Felican novan jaron (and apologies to those languages omitted).

Yes, a new year and a new 'year of...'. 2010 was the International Year of Biodiversity. 2011 is the International Year of Forests. Further, it's a new decade: the United Nations Decade of Biodiversity. Get yours here, a cynic might say, while stocks last...

Oh, and not to mention that we're in the middle of the (fanfare of trumpets) World Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). It's confusing enough for conservation professionals, let alone the different audiences we engage with.

But it is a new year and that means time for a new start. Time to do things differently. No more 'business as usual'.

The phrase 'business as usual' has resounded around the corridors of conservation a lot recently. Following the 2010 Nagoya meeting on biodiversity, it is clear that species are becoming extinct much faster than they are speciating – in some cases more than 1,000 times faster than the fossil record. We are in danger of losing about a quarter of all vertebrate species this century unless we raise our game significantly in terms of ecosystem management, political will and adequate resources for conservation (see the Evolution Lost report for details – [www.zsl.org/evolutionlost](http://www.zsl.org/evolutionlost)). Conservation works – there are success stories and many of these involve zoos and aquariums – but we need to operate on a new, different and larger scale.

At the forefront of facilitating change for environmental sustainability is IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. IUCN is the world's oldest (founded in 1948) and largest global environmental network. It has about 1,000 members, 200 from governments and 800 from non-governmental organisations. There



FRITS HESSELINK (CEC SPECIAL ADVISER) AT THE IUCN-CEC/ZSL/WILDLIFE TRUST OF BANGLADESH TIGER CONSERVATION CEPA WORKSHOP HELD IN BANGLADESH 2010

is a staff of about 1,100 in some 60 countries.

IUCN operates through a global network of more than 10,000 specialists from academics to social activists. These contribute (largely voluntarily) to IUCN's six commissions – on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy; Environmental Law; Ecosystem Management; Protected Areas; Species Survival; and Education and Communication. Many zoos, aquariums and zoological societies are IUCN members and some of their staff are Commission members, mostly within the Species Survival Commission (SSC) which has about 7,500 members.

#### FOCUS ON EDUCATION

This article, however, seeks to draw attention to the Commission on Education and Communication (CEC) ([www.iucn.org/cec](http://www.iucn.org/cec)).

CEC is about learning, knowledge management and strategic communications to drive change for sustainability. It has about 700 members

who work at all levels from senior government to grassroots community conservation. The Commission's secretariat is based at IUCN's Science and Learning Unit. There are various regional vice-chairs (including for Europe and the Mediterranean), national activators and specialist groups, all contactable through the CEC website. The specialist groups comprise those on CEPA (communication, education and public awareness), ESD (Education for Sustainable Development), Environmental Information, Environmental Security, Knowledge Management, Learning and Leadership.

In this new decade, CEC is focusing on strategic communications across the whole of IUCN. Everything, after all, is linked and it is fairly straightforward to unravel many layers of connection. The classic Chaos Theory metaphor of a Brazilian butterfly's flapping wings setting off a chain of events culminating in a Texan tornado may or may not be true, but climate change, deforestation and unsustainable consumption are directly linked to species loss, habitat fragmentation, poverty, freshwater scarcity and much else.

Within the 'One-Programme IUCN', CEC is concerned particularly with biodiversity, climate change and environmental security. Zoo and aquarium professionals will be conversant with the first two, but the emergence of environmental security as a factor of national security is a growing area. Already some government intelligence agencies and military bodies are considering the potential security implications of, say, tsunamis or the extensive flooding seen recently in Pakistan and previously in the southern USA following Hurricane Katrina.

CEC is also prioritising the strengthening of its regional networks, engaging with new audiences, forming alliances with non-traditional partners;

and better integrating learning, knowledge management and strategic communications.

This is why zoo and aquarium educators, interpreters and marketing communicators could benefit hugely from joining IUCN CEC. Zoos and aquariums live in networks at national, regional and global level. CEC is a network of networks, offering enormous opportunities for learning, capacity building and professional development.

There's a lot of practical guidance. CEC members receive a monthly e-newsletter with numerous links to worldwide case studies, best practice and resources.

Other resources include an amazing CEPA toolkit developed for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) by CEC and partners (free download from [www.cepatoolkit.org](http://www.cepatoolkit.org)). It covers an enormous amount of ground about networking and raising awareness, operating CEPA programmes for a wide variety of audiences, planning strategic communications, and why such initiatives are needed. There are many case studies, downloadable exercises, slides and other materials. Any zoo or aquarium educator would benefit, as would their marketing and development (fundraising) staff as the case is made for support that might be incorporated into grant proposals or submissions to donors.

Then there is the 'Guide to Participatory Action Planning and Techniques for Facilitating Groups' ([www.ramsar.org/pdf/outreach\\_actionplanning\\_guide.pdf](http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/outreach_actionplanning_guide.pdf)). Prepared by CEC and others for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, the guide adopts both CEPA and social marketing approaches. Workshop participants review particular conservation (or other) issues in terms of the major stakeholder groups affecting such issues, and their (the stakeholder) perceptions of the issues. The relevant stakeholder groups are then prioritised as the target audiences where behaviour changes are most likely to result in sustainability. The workshop then considers the most appropriate communication interventions to bring about the desired changes.

## Zoo and aquarium educators (and other communications staff) have great skills and creativity

During 2010 Frits Hesselink, a former CEC Chair and current CEC special adviser, used the above Action Plan with colleagues from the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) as the basis for a CEPA workshop concerning tiger conservation in the world's largest mangrove forest. During a week-long cruise in the Bangladesh Sunderbans the partners worked with Government forestry officers, biologists, social activists, media persons and others to formulate a Communications Plan for the conservation of tigers within this specialised ecosystem.

### DEVELOPING INITIATIVES

The approach could just as easily be used for developing a zoo or aquarium CEPA Policy or for any number of *in situ* and *ex situ* initiatives. Further resources include a Climate Science e-learning module (<http://cec.wcln.org/climatechangeupdate/science>) as part of IUCN's Professional Updating Initiative. And remember that your zoo or aquarium is likely to use IUCN's Red List categorisations in its collection planning, inventories, population management and public signage.

If CEC can help to develop zoo and aquarium educators' and communicators' capacity to effect change, then the reverse is also true. Only around 30 EAZA member institutions and federations are members of the IUCN.

But if that's underwhelming, then the number of zoo and aquarium professionals linked to CEC is marginally better than Hainan's population of endemic gibbons. About 20 zoo professionals are listed on the CEC database, of which about one half are within the EAZA region. Almost all are directors or field conservation managers. Fair enough, but where are

the educators?

Zoo and aquarium educators (and other communications staff) have great skills and creativity. Their experience and track record with diverse formal and free-choice learning audiences, their input into curriculum-based school programmes, their contribution to public exhibits and exhibitions, their occasional forays into the magic lands of the *in situ*, their burgeoning work in evaluation and their campaigning prowess could add enormous value to IUCN, the CEC and conservation communication generally. Furthermore, they have the potential to reach 700 million visitors annually.

And consider this: education is a legal obligation for European zoos and aquariums (EU Zoo Directive 1999/22 EC). There's a new EAZA Conservation Education Strategy, available from the Member Area of the EAZA website ([www.eaza.net](http://www.eaza.net)). There is a new Biodiversity Strategy from the CBD following the Nagoya meeting ([www.cbd.int/sp/sp2010p/](http://www.cbd.int/sp/sp2010p/); also see IUCN response – [www.iucn.org/knowledge/news/focus/next\\_steps/down\\_to\\_business/](http://www.iucn.org/knowledge/news/focus/next_steps/down_to_business/)). All of these should inform each other. And nobody wants 'business as usual'.

The timing is right for change. The European Zoo Educators meeting in March 2011 will focus on 'bringing the Conservation Education Strategy to life'. And it's in Valencia, the home of paella. Could there be a more biodiverse meal to fuel the future?

Linking to CEC will really help you, your zoo (or aquarium), IUCN and biodiversity to keep this new year's resolution running. Join IUCN CEC today. Membership is free and directed at individuals rather than institutions (although the zoo or aquarium may or may not be an IUCN member).

To join, contact [cec@iucn.org](mailto:cec@iucn.org).