

Letter From the Chair

As reported in the last issue of this newsletter, several committees were created during the First International Tapir Symposium and I am sure you are all curious to hear about their progress. These committees have been working on specific tasks related to the structure of the TSG, internal and external communication and fundraising. Preliminary results include the creation of guidelines for TSG membership and proposals seeking TSG endorsement/support and the development of a list of responsibilities for each one of the TSG officers. As you have all probably noticed, our *Tapir Conservation* Newsletter editorial team – Siân Waters, Stefan Seitz and Kelly Russo – restructured the publication, increasing the number and quality of articles and improving the country and species representation. Financial support from the Houston Zoological Gardens will enable us to publish two issues per year. The Houston Zoo graphic department is also helping us to develop educational and organisational brochures about tapirs and the TSG.

Our veterinary committee, coordinated by Dr. Sonia Hernandez-Divers, is working on protocols for tapir immobilization, manipulation and collection of biological samples. They are also working to improve communication between field researchers and veterinarians, identifying the needs of field biologists in terms of veterinary support. All this information will be made available on-line soon. Another committee, led by Siân Waters, is working to improve the communication between field researchers and zoos. As part of this work, tapir researchers have been visiting zoos and making presentations about their work in the field and about the TSG.

Our Fundraising Committee is working on the development of strategies to raise funds for the group itself and those tapir researchers and educators working in the field and captivity. We are still working on the ideas generated during the symposium but, as reported before, the main concept is to create a TSG Conservation Fund functioning as an additional funding source for tapir projects. We believe that a major advantage of this strategy is that we will be raising funds for tapir conservation in general and not for specific projects. Since Specialist Groups are not legal entities in themselves, we will rely on the Tapir Preservation Fund (TPF) to collect, manage and distribute the grants to researchers through a selection process. The committee is currently putting together a proposal for the TSG as a whole. Once we have this proposal, we will iden-

tify and contact potential donors such as the large conservation NGOs, trusts and foundations, zoos, industries, private donors, etc. In addition to a standard written proposal we will prepare a multimedia presentation that can be presented in person by TSG representatives.

We are also planning a major zoo campaign directed at tapir holders worldwide, but particularly in the United States and Europe, to seek contributions, as has been done for other taxonomic groups in the past. Ideally we would have the support of the AZA and EAZA Tapir TAGs for organizing and conducting this campaign. Another strategy we will use to raise funds will be the development of the “Friends of TSG” program. The idea is to create a list of and contact potential private donors that could make annual contributions to the TSG Conservation Fund. We will have several different ranges of contribution and each person will be able to choose how much she/he would like to donate.

During the past few weeks, we had to make a few changes in the structure of the TSG group. Our membership list was reviewed and updated and six members were removed from the group. Some of them requested their withdrawal due to personal and/or professional reasons and some were removed due to their complete lack of communication with the group. Now, more than ever in the history of the Tapir Specialist Group, we need the support of the membership to reach all the objectives and goals we have set. We need active and communicative members working with us. We keep saying that the communication between TSG members and tapir people in general has increased significantly over the past few years, but we still have a long way to go in terms of establishing really effective and productive communication between us. We have a lot of work to do and we need the membership to be active and working as a group.

Fifteen field projects are currently being conducted by TSG members, 5 on lowland tapirs, 4 on Baird’s tapirs, 4 on mountain tapirs and 2 on Asian tapirs. I am especially glad to communicate that a Malay Tapir Research Project has



just been established at Krau Wildlife Reserve in Malaysia. The research is being carried out under the coordination of our TSG member Bengt Holst from the Copenhagen Zoo in close cooperation with the University of Copenhagen and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks of Malaysia. Bengt has planned to conduct a series of research projects in Peninsular Malaysia with the purpose of studying tapir behaviour and ecology and the first phase of this project involves a pilot radio telemetry study in Krau Reserve (see a brief report on this study in the news section).

I am also especially happy to communicate that we have been receiving a significant number of e-mail messages from researchers in Brazil, Peru, Guatemala, French Guyana, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Ecuador, countries where we haven't had many contacts in the past. Two researchers in Peru, one in Brazil, one in French Guiana and one in Costa Rica are establishing tapir research projects in several different forest habitats in their countries. It is really amazing how much the number of tapir projects has increased over the past five or six years and it is our job to give these professionals as much support as they need to establish their projects.

In October 2002, the Ministry of the Environment and the National University of Colombia hosted a workshop to discuss the current status and conservation priorities for the three tapir species inhabiting Colombia. Our TSG member, Olga Montenegro, was the main organiser of the workshop. Participants included representatives from universities, zoos, NGOs, governmental agencies, parks, etc. Our TSG members Emilio Constantino (Species Coordinator for mountain tapirs), Olga Montenegro, Diego Lizcano, Franz Kastón Flores, Jaime Suárez and Sérgio Sandoval Arenas were active participants of the workshop and shared their knowledge regarding the conservation status of tapirs in Colombia. Our Deputy-Chair, Charles Foerster, and myself were invited to participate in the event and contribute to the development of a tapir action plan for that country. I strongly believe that the action plan produced during this workshop is a very high quality document and will be an extremely useful tool for the conservation of tapirs in Colombia and in other countries of Latin America. The results from this workshop can be found in A Short Report from a Workshop on Tapir Conservation in Colombia in this issue.

The TSG, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks of Malaysia, the EAZA Tapir and Hippo TAG, and the IUCN/SSC Conservation Breeding Specialist Group are

working on the organisation of a Malay Tapir Conservation Workshop. During the First International Tapir Symposium it became clear that one of the biggest concerns among tapir experts today is Malay tapir conservation. Based on this, the TSG decided to organise and hold a workshop in Asia, and the selected venue was Malaysia. The main goal of the workshop is to gather, evaluate and discuss all available data and information on Malay tapirs and to use this information for the revision of the Malay tapir chapter of the 1997 Tapir Action Plan. This will then generate research and establish management options and conservation priorities for the species. The workshop will be held in Krau Wildlife Reserve in April 2003 and will have 60 invited participants representing all the tapir range countries in Asia. For more details about this event, please see the "Malay Tapir Conservation Workshop" article in this issue.

I also would like to mention that the TSG is already taking the first steps on the organisation of the II International Tapir Symposium, which will be held in Panama City, Panama, in November or December of 2003. In January 2003, members of the TSG will meet in Houston, in the United States, to form the organising committee and start working on the final planning. As always, we will keep you updated on this and we hope you will be able to be with us in Panama.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you who submitted contributions for this issue. We hope to be able to continue improving our *Tapir Conservation* Newsletter and your contributions are fundamental for this process.

Thank you very much!

My very best wishes from Brazil,

Patrícia Medici

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