

## From the Chair

### Letter from the Chair Patrícia Medici

This time around I would like to start this letter by stating how thrilled and awed I am by the level of involvement and commitment of Tapir Specialist Group members. It is fantastic to see how well our TSG structure has been functioning, how wonderfully our committees have been progressing with their goals and actions, and how hard our members have been working. It is truly amazing to observe the commitment and dedication of so many people spread all over the planet. It is mind-boggling to think that it is all voluntary work and that most of these people actually use money from their own pockets to be able to conduct their activities within the group. I strongly believe that the TSG network has reached a level of communication, cooperation and effectiveness never before seen in the history of the group, which certainly has very positive effects on the quality of our work.

As you will probably remember, during the Second International Tapir Symposium held in Panama in January 2004, we developed the TSG Plans for Action 2004-2005. This document consisted of a list of short-term priority goals and actions that we, as a group, should achieve if we were to be more effective advocates for tapir conservation. The document included an ambitious list of **27** priority goals and **55** specific actions that we committed to put into practice before the Third Symposium in Argentina in January 2006. As one of the many activities we have been conducting in order to get prepared for the Third Symposium, we are reviewing the TSG Plans for Action in order to be able to make a presentation in Argentina and inform everyone about the actions that have been completed. So far, my reckoning is that over the past 19 months we have achieved **70%** of the actions listed on the Panama document, which is really impressive and proves my point that our membership is working harder and harder every day.

On the action planning front, we have just come back from Belize, Central America, where we held the

“Baird’s Tapir Conservation Workshop: Population and Habitat Viability Assessment (PHVA)” from August 15 to 19, 2005, the third workshop of a series of four, and another very successful meeting for the TSG. We had 60 participants from Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Panama, as well as a number of TSG officers and international participants. Considering that there are four tapir species, and that three of them (Malay, mountain and Baird’s tapirs) have been the focus of previous PHVA workshops we have now finalized 75% of the second version of the Tapir Action Plan. We are now left with one last species to work with – the lowland tapir – and this fourth PHVA Workshop will be held by late 2006



**Participants of the Baird’s Tapir Conservation Workshop: Population and Habitat Viability Assessment (PHVA), held in Belize, August 2005.**

or early 2007 in Brazil. For further details about the PHVA workshops please see the article included in this issue.

Speaking of action planning, I would like to let you know that the Colombian Ministry of Environment has printed and distributed the “Programa Nacional para la Conservación del Género *Tapirus* en Colombia” (National Program for the Conservation of the Genus *Tapirus* in Colombia). The Colombian Action Plan was developed through an inter-institutional partnership between the Colombian Ministry of Environment and the Natural Science Institute of the National University of Colombia, as part of a National Strategic Plan for Endangered Species Conservation in the country. The preliminary version of the document was written by



**Cover of the briefing book published for the Baird's Tapir Conservation Workshop in Belize.**

TSG member Olga Montenegro and discussed during a national workshop held at the Otún-Quimbaya Flora and Fauna National Sanctuary in August 2002. Fifty professionals attended the workshop, including representatives of the Ministry of Environment, regional environmental agencies, national parks, zoos, research institutions, universities and TSG members. The publication of this document is a major achievement given the fact that the Ministry of Environment officially recognizes tapirs as priority species for conservation under the Colombian policies. Each action listed in the document can be easily turned into a project, therefore the document can be seen as a strategic plan with measurable achievements that can be followed through time, with specific goals and expected results. Moreover, the document also represents the first updated National Action Plan for a tapir range country, which is one of the goals outlined in the Panama meeting.

A major task we have been taking care of right now is the organization of the Third International Tapir Symposium, which will be held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from January 26 to 31, 2006. The First International Tapir Symposium, held in San José, Costa Rica, in November 2001, and the Second International Tapir Symposium, held in Panama City, Republic of Panama, in January 2004, attracted hundreds of tapir experts and conservationists from over 30 different countries, and proved to be critical occasions for tapir conservation worldwide. The Third International Tapir Symposium, which is being organized by the TSG, the Fundación Temaikén in Argentina, and the Houston Zoo Inc., will once again bring together a multi-faceted group of tapir experts, including field biologists, environmental educators, captivity specialists, academics, researchers, veterinarians, governmental authorities,

politicians and other interested parties. The first part of the symposium will consist of presentations by tapir researchers, keynote speakers and other professionals addressing tapir biology, research, conservation, and management. Session topics will cover a wide range of issues relevant to tapir conservation, such as field research, population management, husbandry, fundraising, marketing, governmental regulations, eco-tourism, education, veterinary issues etc. The second part of the symposium will be devoted to reports from all TSG committee coordinators, and workshops addressing some of the most serious issues facing tapir conservation today, such as action planning, tapir husbandry and captive management, tapir biogeography and paleontology, tapir/human conflicts, and tapir management (reintroductions and translocations). Additionally, we will review the goals and actions listed in the TSG Plans for Action 2004-2005 developed in Panama, and work on a brand new plan of action for the group. All sessions will be conducted in English and simultaneously translated into Spanish. This third symposium promises to be even larger and more successful than the first two meetings and at least 150 participants from over 25 countries are expected to attend the third one. The institutional supporters of the symposium are the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) Tapir Taxon Advisory Group (TAG) and the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) Tapir Taxon Advisory Group (TAG), and the funding will come from conservation organizations, mostly zoological institutions, in the United States and Europe.

Something else worth mentioning is the production of a tapir documentary by Sky One satellite Television in the United Kingdom. TSG member Charles Foerster, who has been conducting field



**Cover of the National Program for the Conservation of the Genus *Tapirus* in Colombia, published by the Colombian Ministry of Environment.**

research on Baird's tapirs in Corcovado National Park, Costa Rica, for the past eleven years, was visited by Tiger Aspect documentary filmmakers for the making of "Final Chance to Save..." which broadcasted on Sky One TV in early September. Sky One introduces the start of a new documentary series that highlights the potential extinction of some of the world's most famous species. Working with Tiger Aspect Productions, the series follows a team of experts assisted by a well-known personality. Each documentary highlights the plight of the world's most endangered animals, including the orangutans of Borneo, Kenya's black rhino, Costa Rica's tapirs and the Caribbean's sea turtles. In the case of the tapir documentary, the celebrity involved was the British comedian, Vic Reeves. "Final Chance To Save" also explains what individuals can do to assist with the conservation of the focal species, and both Sky One and the producers of the tapir show were very generous in agreeing to mention TSG and our work and what people can do to help. Additionally, Sky One has linked their website to the TSG website and we have been receiving dozens of e-mail messages from people in the UK who saw the documentary and want to make donations to the TSG Conservation Fund. The kind of publicity that the show brought to the general public is difficult to achieve on our own, considering that we do not have funds for media relationships in our budget.

All in all, our fantastic team of tapir experts, researchers and partners has been moving steadily towards achieving our goals and following our plans. Meanwhile, research on many fronts has also provided new clues vital for our conservation work. Carlos Pedraza reports about the population genetics work his team of TSG members is conducting (a combination of GIS and genetics) to survey Mountain tapir populations in Colombia. Their methodology will represent an important step forward for tapir conservation because it will hopefully allow researchers to census and survey animals with direct non-invasive evidence and also measure potential detrimental effects of fragmentation. Similarly, the WildTrack project is gathering data for the development of preliminary tools for surveying tapir populations with footprints, which is also of paramount importance, because this method could be readily used by any field researcher at a very low cost. Wilson Novarino reports findings with his camera trap study on Malay tapirs and how they use their habitat, while a new publication with the first report of tapir copulation, gestation length and interbirth interval was put out by Juan de Dios Valdez Leal. You will read about all these above research results and progress achievements in this issue of the Newsletter.

I am sure you will find our collective work and synergism as impressive, humbling and awe-inspiring as I do. Let's keep up this momentum.

Hope to see you all in Buenos Aires in January.

My very best wishes from Brazil,

**Patrícia Medici**

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**Heidi Jean Frohring,  
1967-2005**

*By Patrícia Medici & Sheryl Todd*

It is with great sadness that we write to inform our *Tapir Conservation* Newsletter readers that our dear friend Heidi Frohring, tapir keeper at the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington, United States, passed away on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005.



**Heidi Frohring and one of her charges, a Malay tapir baby at the Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle.**

You might have met Heidi around the tapir enclosure at the zoo. If you did, you would not forget her. Tall, red-haired, vivacious, and always happy to talk to