

Report on the Australasian Wildlife Management Society: 21st Annual Conference

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The 21st annual conference of the Australasian Wildlife Management Society was held in the historic and fully refurbished Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle in Western Australia from 24 to 27 November 2008. It was attended by some 200 delegates, mainly from Australia, with 102 papers on wildlife management matters in Australia, 6 on New Zealand, 4 each on South Africa and the USA, and 1 each on Malaysia, Israel, Tanzania, Fiji and Nepal. The conference theme was: Human Impacts on Wildlife.

The keynote address was delivered by Prof. C. J. Krebs, currently of the University of Canberra. It was titled: Whither wildlife management in an era of climate change. Unfortunately it was mainly a summary of past approaches, with the only noteworthy statement being that more long-term studies on specific topics of research are required. The conference consisted of 5 sessions specifically for student papers and 15 open sessions. The open sessions dealt with specific wildlife management problems mainly and included sessions on managing the impacts of alien foxes, managing wildlife in conjunction with the production of other basic resources (mining), several sessions on managing threatened or invasive species, a session on wildlife diseases, one on urban wildlife conservation, one on community ecology and one on the sustainable use of wildlife. The latter is still in its infancy in Australia due to many restrictions and opposition from various quarters. There also were symposia on marine wildlife and on wild deer.

It was clear that, despite the view of Krebs, many of the studies which were reported on were of a short-term nature, especially those of the graduate students. This underlined the need for such projects to be linked to long-term study programmes in which graduate students form links in an ongoing chain of

research. As could be expected in Australia, many papers also dealt with the impact, control and ecology of invasive animals such as foxes and feral cats, camels, pigs and goats, and rats, while others dealt with the endangered fauna of Australia. One of the more thought provoking papers was given by Prof. Pat Kennedy of Oregon State University in the USA who advocated that wildlife biologists move away from using vegetation communities or types as a basis for wildlife habitat in favour of landscape units, as has been done in the Kruger National Park. There were relatively few papers on community or meta-population ecology and management, with most of the papers focusing on individual species or subspecies.

Poaching of wildlife in Masailand, Tanzania was dealt with in one paper, while other African papers dealt with the use of bushmeat, the sustainable use of wildlife and the concept of function-based habitat design as a wildlife conservation tool, especially in urban areas and especially for smaller mammals and birds. The latter paper also emphasised the necessity of human intervention to restore optimality of function in degraded habitats, including urban areas. Several papers also dealt with research aids such as camera-trapping, Geographic Information Systems, tagging and telemetry, while genetic aspects also received some attention. Surprisingly few papers dealt with the possible future impact of global climate change on wildlife conservation.

Overall, the conference gave an insight into the enormous challenges that especially face the Australian wildlife biologists to deal with the impact of alien wildlife on their own indigenous ones. Moreover, the adoption of a more sustainable use focus than the current preservation one should benefit Australian wildlife conservation. More details on the conference and the paper abstracts can be found on the website

<http://www.awms.org.nz>