

ISSG Report from World Conservation Congress, Barcelona Oct 2008

Comments collated from ISSG members at WCC. Report written by Michael Browne

The IUCN SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) hosted 4 events at the World Conservation Congress (WCC) and ISSG staff and members participated in many other events and side meetings. The WCC was also the occasion for Mick Clout to formally announce his resignation as Chair of ISSG. Since its founding in 1993, the group has grown to a total of 194 invasive species experts from 40 countries around the world. Tangible achievements include the Aliens newsletter, the Aliens-L listserv, the Global Invasive Species Database (GISD), the IUCN Guidelines for the Prevention of Biodiversity Loss caused by Alien Invasive Species, the CBD Cooperative Initiative on Island Invasive Alien Species, hosting of the 2001 International Conference on Eradication of Island Invasives and co-organising the 2008 Expert Workshop on Best Practices for Pre-import Screening Of Live Animals in International Trade. The ISSG website (www.issg.org) has links to all of these. Holly Dublin (outgoing SSC Chair) thanked Mick for the 15 years he has dedicated to the ISSG since its founding in 1993 and presented him with the Sir Peter Scott Award. Mick's successor will be appointed by the new SSC Chair, Simon Stuart, early next year. ISSG also organised an informal lunch which was attended by a dozen ISSG members including the retiring Chair, Mick Clout, and the Deputy Chair, Piero Genovesi.

Dr. Ahmed Djoghlaif, the Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, provided ISSG with a statement to be read at its 4 events in which he congratulated the organisers, recognised the severity of the threat posed by invasive alien species (IAS), and reaffirmed the May 2008 decision taken by Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at COP 9 in Bonn reiterating the importance of access to, and availability of, information on invasive alien species for national implementation of the invasive alien species programme of work, and inviting Parties and relevant international organizations to support initiatives for collecting and making relevant information available, as well as ensuring interoperability and facilitated access to these data. His support is greatly appreciated.

The Global Invasive Species Database (GISD), the Global Registry on Invasive Species (GRIS), and the Global Invasive Species Information Network (GISIN) are amongst the initiatives for collecting and making relevant information available recognised in Article 29 of COP 9 Decision IX/4 (Bonn, 19 - 30 May 2008) on the in-depth review of ongoing work on alien species that threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.

Four ISSG events:

The 4 ISSG events were originally conceived by Maj De Poorter before her departure from ISSG in July this year. It is thanks largely to her foresight, planning and on-going support that the events were successful in giving invasive species issues a high profile at the WCC. Thanks are due also to the WCC organisers and support staff and to ISSG's longstanding partner at the National Biological Information Infrastructure of the US Geological Survey, Annie Simpson, for the vital support she provided to ISSG throughout the congress. Michael Browne organised 3 events and the PII event was organised by Souad Boudjelas (#290). The events attracted large numbers of participants and attracted a lot of feedback. Meeting documents, including participant lists, presentations and reports, are available by clicking on the appropriate event number on the WCC programme at <http://208.112.69.59/agenda/> or by contacting Michael Browne at m.browne@auckland.ac.nz

The 4 events hosted by the IUCN SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) were:

- Event Number 378: Partnership for a Comprehensive Invasive Species Information System.
- Event Number 290: Celebrating success of a partnership approach to invasive species management to safeguard biodiversity and livelihoods.

- Event Number 375: Safeguarding biodiversity and livelihoods from biological invasion: global sharing of experience and information as a key step to effective management at the local level.
- Event Number 300: Combating invasive species at the regional level: the importance of a coordinated approach to information management.

Brief reports from the 4 events:

1. Knowledge Café #378 on Tuesday 7th October was entitled; "*Partnership for a Comprehensive Invasive Species Information System*". A discussion paper circulated prior to this event outlined why IAS data and information is needed and described the current status of IAS data and information on a global scale. As a result of the roundtable discussion, cooperation of 5 entities already involved in global-scale initiatives was consolidated and a number of constructive suggestions for widening active participation by other potential partners and donors were proposed. The 5 entities, whose activities are increasingly integrated, are the Global Invasive Species Information Network (GISIN), the Global Invasive Species Database (GISD), the Global Register of Invasive Species (GRIS), the Invasives Information Network (I3N) of the Inter-American Biodiversity Information Network, and BioNET-INTERNATIONAL.

Suggestions from participants included development of a funding consortium of primary users of invasive species information (national governments and their agencies, educational and research institutions, conservation NGOs), EU support for the creation of national IAS information systems for neighbouring countries and overseas territories, seeking revenue via sponsorship and advertising, and fundraising around specific invasive species problems. One way to justify the expense of creating and maintaining global-scale invasive species data and information would be to deliver it to a proposed Early Warning System for Europe. Europe would receive alerts about IAS that occur in neighbouring countries and trading partners, and predictions of the potential distribution and impacts of invasive species under present conditions and future climate change scenarios.

Participants in the #378 event included representatives from the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Birdlife International, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Institute for Environmental Protection and Research, the European Plant Protection Convention Secretariat, the Nature Conservancy, the Global Invasive Species Programme, the IUCN SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group, the IUCN SSC Sustainable Use Specialist Group, the National Biological Information Infrastructure of the US Geological Survey, the Catalonia Dept. of Environment & Housing, Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife, the Catalan Water Agency, the Balearis Government and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD).

2. "*Celebrating success of a partnership approach to invasive species management to safeguard biodiversity and livelihoods*" was the title of #290 Alliance Workshop on Tuesday 7 October. The lively exchange of ideas that followed presentations about demonstration projects supported by the Pacific Invasives Initiative (PII) covered topics such as the diversity of target species (including conflict species), the inclusion of countries with islands as well as island states in this initiative, the importance of people and livelihood issues with respect to biodiversity issues, and lessons other regions can learn from PII. There is growing interest in the Cooperative Island Initiative (CII) model from Europe, the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean, especially the project development protocols developed by PII over the past 4 years. Participants discussed potential funding sources ranging from the private sector to development aid programmes, the importance of cooperation and institutional relationships, and how to take PII's momentum beyond its NZ supported start-up.

PII, GISP and other partners are planning a workshop on regional cooperation on IAS threats to be hosted by NZ, possibly in June 2009. The workshop will look at differences, similarities, opportunities and challenges in order to crystallise existing work and build cooperation. The role that PII can play as a catalyst will be dealt with at the 2009 conference.

3. Learning Opportunity #375 on Wednesday 8, October was entitled "*Safeguarding biodiversity and livelihoods from biological invasion: global sharing of experience and information as a key step to effective*

management at local level." The purpose of Learning Opportunity #375 was to improve participants' knowledge of free, widely available tools and services that provide invasive species information, and then to guide the application of this knowledge to case studies that participants bring to the workshop. A diverse range of information exchange tools and services were presented. Annie Simpson led a guessing game called "Invasive Alien or Native Species?" in which participants had to guess the native/alien status of well-known invasive species in different geographic contexts. Shyama Pagad presented and handed out the ISSG CD-ROM, which contains many useful invasive species information resources such as those provided by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the IUCN and the Global Invasive Species Programme. It contains links to invasive species and other biodiversity databases, links to image databases and to species identification and taxonomic resources, and information about cross-cutting issues such as biofuels and climate change.

Participants were actively engaged in applying invasive species information tools and services to case studies that they had brought to the workshop. Case studies included questions about the risk of establishment of parakeets in the UK; the need for management information and evidence of negative impacts of black bullhead (*Ameiurus melas*) to raise awareness about this alien invader in Italy; the expected lifespan of invasive reptiles and birds; information for management of *Leucaena leucocephala* in Taiwan, including costs, techniques and prioritisation; habitat requirements and tolerances of the cycad scale insect (*Aulacaspis yasumatsui*); potential predators of the lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) for biocontrol in the Bahamas; resources for identification of undescribed fish species in the Mekong river; management of Syrian mesquite (*Prosopis fraxta*) including restoration; guidelines for managing *Acacia mearnsii* which is escaping from plantations in Africa; and information about the negative impacts and management of the common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*). We have received a lot of positive feedback from this event and we are awaiting the results of an evaluation that is being processed by a team from Universalia.

4. Knowledge Café #300, which was entitled: "*Combating invasive species at the regional level: the importance of a coordinated approach to information management*", aimed to stimulate the collection of invasive species data and information by exploring opportunities to adapt and use elsewhere the coordinated approach used by the French Committee of the IUCN. The "Initiative on Invasive Species in French Overseas Territories" hired a programme coordinator (Yohann Soubeyran) who used local volunteers to coordinate the collection of baseline information about invasive species in 10 French overseas territories, including introduction case studies; the invasion process; impacts (including climate change) and mobilisation for management. Two workshops bringing together local coordinators and different stakeholders were organized to share experiences and plan the different steps and activities of the programme. After two years a summary report was generated, including a species inventory, impact, action taken, legal frameworks implemented and recommendations. The programme used the Global Invasive Species Database (GISD) as a repository for information collected in both French and English.

It was clear from the start of Knowledge Café #300 that many stakeholders are mobilized against IAS, but in spite of geographical and ecological differences, they face similar difficulties: weak public awareness, poorly accessible scientific data, lack of coordination, and unsuitable legal instruments. The main take-home message is that we must share our invasive species data and information with others around the world because this information will improve everyone's ability to respond to invasive species more effectively (this can be achieved at a reasonable cost and there are a variety of models to suit different capacities). Participants also expressed strong support for regional coordination in actions against IAS, for public outreach efforts which can result in effective voluntary efforts for early detection and rapid response, and for efforts to address important gaps in legislation to control invasive species introductions from the mainland to overseas territories (and inter-island transfers).

Some of the other events at WCC:

Stop Biodiversity Being Invaded: make the world aware of the threat of invasive species

This workshop investigated why the notion and seriousness of threats and impacts of alien invasive species is well-known in some sectors of conservation and development yet is barely understood by most people. Examples of recent threats were given and solutions described.

CleanTrade: Threading the Needle of Invasive Species and Trade:

This session served as an initial convening point for individuals interested in identifying opportunities, obstacles and next steps to improve international and national policy, to reduce tension between facilitating free trade and regulating that trade for environmental and human health, and to reduce the introduction of invasive species to new environments.

Conservation problems and solutions for biological diversity in European islands:

The Council of Europe held a Knowledge Café to enquire whether there was enough support for the creation of a permanent Working Group on European Island Biodiversity to act within the framework of the European Wildlife Convention (also known as the Bern Convention). During the roundtable discussion, several ideas regarding what that group might become involved in were put forward. They included work on Invasive Alien Species, the effects of climate change on island ecosystems, developing endemic species lists and evaluating their status, and on monitoring the use of small islands by migratory birds or migratory sea mammals. There was agreement that such an intergovernmental group could usefully liaise with many existing initiatives in what is a very active conservation and scientific environment. There is also the opportunity to contribute to other initiatives on conservation of island biodiversity such as those in the Pacific and the Caribbean and have a positive input in the CBD process. If the ruling body of the Bern Convention agrees, the Working Group on European Island Biodiversity will have its first meeting in October 2009 in Tenerife (Canary Islands, Spain)

Launch of the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA):

Strong support from the “Proteus Partners” consortium enabled major improvements to the World Database on Protected Areas and improved its credibility. You can explore the most comprehensive global dataset on marine and terrestrial protected areas at <http://sea.unep-wcmc.org/wdbpa>. Charles Besancon and his colleagues expressed their interest in integrating invasive species data in the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA). Fortunately, GISD data is indexed by Protected Area Name so integration is relatively straightforward. However, an investment in developing and maintaining information about IAS in Protected Areas is required, especially in the developing world. One option is to develop formalised networks of data providers. Another is to use point occurrence data from Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) data providers to establish which IAS are in which Protected Area.

Scaling species-based indicators from a global to a regional and national level. Biodiversity Indicators Partnership (BIP):

There is increasing demand for scaling global indicators to a national or regional level which can more easily be incorporated into policy and decision making processes. The Sampled IUCN Red List, which uses the conservation status of species to measure changes in extinction risk over time, and population based indicators such as the WWF Living Planet Index and the RSPB Wild Bird Index were presented. Speakers emphasised the need to make resources available to collect data in a standard way. Melodie McGeoch outlined the proposed simple invasive species indicators:

- I. Number and names of invasive alien species per country.
- II. Number of operational management plans relating to IAS in place.
- III. Number of countries party to relevant international agreements.

In response to a question about data availability, Michael Browne confirmed that at the global scale, IAS data are geographically patchy and of relatively poor quality and he reiterated ISSG's and its partners' belief that BIP resources should be directed to addressing this issue (as far as possible), rather than on development of a dedicated Invasive Alien Species Indicator Database (IID). The GISD, GRIS and GISIN already deliver numbers and names of invasive alien species per country and case studies of management projects that are completed, underway or planned.

Conservation Commons: Working to ensure conscious and equitable sharing of knowledge resources to advance conservation:

The purpose of this workshop was to draw attention to the barriers faced in the conservation community limiting access to biodiversity data and information and efforts to collectively address these challenges. While some barriers are technical in nature, many are institutional, legal, and cultural in origin. Nick King

updated the audience on the Global Names Architecture (GNA) which GISIN and GRIS will soon be using to resolve taxonomy. He said we need to improve information sharing because we need a constant understanding of the things we are working on. One presentation identified an initiative called DataBasin.org which publishes and hosts data and metadata for free. This is great news as significant costs are incurred in procuring and cleaning raw data for modelling (e.g. predicting the potential distribution of invasive species). Modellers could use DataBasin.org to host both the raw and cleaned data, along with information about how it was cleaned and why. The demand for this kind of service arose at the April 9-11 2008 workshop entitled; “Best practices in pre-import risk screening for species of live animals in international trade”.

Side meeting:

Links between the IUCN Red List and Global Invasive Species Database (GISD):

ISSG, the IUCN Species Programme and partners including Birdlife International and the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) met to refine and progress a funding proposal aimed at forming deeper links between invasive species data and endangered species data, and establishing a platform for continued development. Ali Stattersfield, from Birdlife International, has prepared a draft concept note that describes a three-way project, linking ISSG efforts closely with Redlisting (through the IUCN Species programme and relevant Partners), but also tying into policy processes through GISP, thereby linking to national work via the CBD (e.g. IAS lists informing and being informed by national IAS action plans). A key objective is to provide better information about the effects of invasive species and prevention and management options.

IAS lists can evolve from and influence Redlisting, and the integrated data generated from this initiative could be used for (island) prioritization analyses, modelling the spread of IAS, populating IAS indicators, informing early warning systems and awareness raising. Discussion topics ranged from current funding models and progress to date, to the suitability of data for particular applications (e.g. comprehensive regional IAS inventory data can inform policy, global-scale IAS data can identify potential threats for early warning systems). Other topics covered were; alternative data collection methods, greater interactions between experts from both communities, the need to extend this initiative eventually to include links to Ramsar data and the World Database on Protected Areas, potential use of GBIF data, and the need to focus more on threat mitigation.

Invitation:

The World Conservation Congress was a busy time for the author of this report. This report has been circulated to ISSG members who were present in Barcelona for their input, but there are certainly many important events and information items that it does not mention. I'd like to suggest that the list server is a good way to rectify omissions and errors, and to report on other events that are of interest to the invasive species community.

Michael Browne

20 November 2008