

WILD SIDE

Newsletter of the AVCB

A Special Interest Group of the Australian Veterinary Association

SUMMER 2015

Who Exactly Is in Charge Here?

by
Michael Banyard

When it comes to conservation biology and sustainability of the environment a question we all ponder is, "Who exactly is in charge here?" or to put it another way, "What are the forces at play and who or what controls them?"

The responses to these questions are varied: no one, everyone, the UN, National Governments, Regional Governments, farmers, poachers, corporates, environmentalists It just goes on. In addition, because many of

these individuals and groups are international, regulation and agreement must be global.

Even for people who have worked in conservation biology all their lives, this line of thought can be overwhelming and disempowering.

These emotional and cognitive processes were discussed recently by Robert Gifford in *New Scientist* (3029, 11 July 2015) in his article "33 reasons why we can't think clearly about climate change".

In countries where national governments struggle to maintain law and order such issues are infinitely more difficult to monitor and intervene. In such circumstances obtaining meaningful data on endangered species is fraught. So, for those relatively new to conservation there is a body of information to assimilate to try and come to terms with the huge global forces at play. They impact directly on the survival of native animals.

For the next few issues of *Wild Side* we will briefly introduce some of the conventions, agreements and forces which impact profoundly on the conservation of the environment.

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"CITES" by BlankMap-World6.svg: Canuckguy (talk) and many others derivative work: – Felix Reimann (talk) - BlankMap-World6.svg. Licensed under Public Domain via Commons - <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CITES.svg#/media/File:CITES.svg>



Who What Where?



Photo M. Banyard



Photo T. Mather

At this lovely but arid location, where the waters flow inland and never meet the sea, can be found some wildlife hotspots. This is one, can you guess where it might be?

The animal of interest is seen with its head above the muddy water in the left panel. Can you hazard its identity? Swimming at this location is an interesting experience, gliding over these submerged objects in the muddy water. On page 5 some of your questions will be answered.

CITES

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international convention set up by International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

It is a voluntary group funded by partner countries. The convention works by subjecting the export and import and re-export of CITES-listed species to a voluntary audit trail.

Approximately 5000 animal species and 29,000 plant species are monitored against over exploitation. IUCN maintains lists of all threatened species and ranks them in appendices according to their vulnerability <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

These lists are pivotal to the working of CITES.

Although the structure, agreement and coverage of the convention is impressive significant practical problems exist.

The day-to-day management is confounded by commercial and illegal forces at play as discussed in "Lizard traffickers exploit legal loopholes to trade at world's biggest fair", by Arthur Neslen, Guardian 11 November 2015 and "Cites: bid to curb sale of ivory and rhino horn voted down", by Damian Carrington, Guardian 8 March 2013.

Under the convention, compliance issues of export are monitored in member countries who appoint one or more agencies.

In Australia this is the Department of the Environment <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/wildlife-trade/cites/cites-species>

While it is easy to despair at the flaws in the system one should perhaps reflect that things would be significantly worse if no such mechanism was in place.



Review of AVCB

We need (much more) help!

Michael Banyard

Members will be aware that, since April 2015, the Working Group(see below) has been reviewing the SIG's mission, activities, collaborations and ultimately its viability. This has involved regular teleconferences of the group and email communication with members to advise you of our progress and to seek your input and help.

Thus far a number of members have made very useful comments and contributions. However we need to go much

harder if the SIG is to have an assured future.

We need to align the purpose for the SIG's existence with the delivery of required activities to members and the broader community that meet that need. Also there are a number of groups like Wildlife Health Australia and Wildlife Diseases Association - Australasia who do a great job in providing education, information and networking services to veterinarians and non-veterinarians alike. AVBC needs to identify what its current role is.

The mission statement that is

posted on our Web Site (see page 4) is being revised to ensure that it is current. You are encouraged to review it and provide comments mbanyard@netspeed.com.au.

With our objectives re-defined we can look for people and resources to help bring them about. Without predicting the final outcome or the review some of those activities are predictable and include people who might help in the areas of:

Being involved is rewarding. Being helpful is satisfying. Sitting on the sidelines is no help at all. Become engaged—your contributions will be most welcome!

- ◆ Student Liaison – could be more than one person
- ◆ Newsletter Editor and Contributors
- ◆ Executive Members – President, Treasurer, Secretary and Committee – elections will be held at AVA Conference May 2016 Adelaide
- ◆ Networking Coordinator
- ◆ Communication and Media including Facebook
- ◆ Policy Councillor

Please contact Michael if you have any interest in the following areas.

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Working Group

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Note: AVCB is being managed by the Working Group because elections have not been held since 2010. They will be replaced by an elected Committee in May 2016 or steps taken to wind up the SIG.



CONSERVATION BIOLOGY MISSION STATEMENT AS ON THE WEB SITE

What do we do?

The involvement of veterinarians with wildlife goes well beyond the activities of zoo veterinarians, and this was one of the drivers in the establishment of an AVA Special Interest Group (SIG) that would cater for the needs and aspirations of those with any interest in the conservation of biodiversity.

In defining the scope for such a group there was also a need to choose a name for the SIG that was descriptive of its aims. In this regard it was decided that the term "veterinary conservation biology (VCB)" was an accurate statement of the wide spectrum of activities that it would include. The term "conservation biology" was already being widely used to describe a new multidisciplinary science that sought to understand the nature and scope of human impacts on biodiversity and to seek practical solutions to these. Adding the word "veterinary" simply emphasized the potential role for veterinarians in teams with other biologists, wildlife managers, economists and other advisers to governments and farmers alike. It then became possible to describe the range of activities encompassed by the term VCB, which fall under these five headings:

1. **Conservation medicine** - wildlife health in all its contexts from ecosystem health involving free-living populations to the health and welfare of captive animals, including sick, injured or orphaned fauna in the hands of veterinarians or wildlife carers. There is increasing interest in defining the links between wildlife health, human health and the health of livestock, with the Australian Wildlife Health Network (AWHN) now one of the key players. With the additional work of the Australian Registry of Wildlife Health and a number of other facilities and it is fair to say that conservation medicine has made immense bounds in the last decade or so.
 2. **Conservation of endangered species** - both in situ and ex situ activities involving the use of tools like enhanced reproductive technologies, conservation genetics, powerful data recording systems and databases and the work of Taxon Advisory Groups under the Australian Species Management Plan (ASMP). There are many roles for veterinarians in these fields, including an oversight of animal welfare.
 3. **Sustainable farming including off-reserve conservation** - there is now an understanding of the need to take a "whole farm" approach when giving advice to land owners. This includes control of invasive species and the development of land use strategies that include incentives to preserve native vegetation. Every large animal practitioner can play a part in this.
 4. **Sustainable utilisation of wildlife** - from the commercial harvest of free-living animals (e.g. kangaroos, feral pigs and fisheries) to modern game farming and ranching (crocodiles, deer, emus) and ecotourism. There is a multiplicity of roles for veterinarians, from health and production issues to animal welfare.
 5. **Import and export of wildlife** - both quarantine and conservation activities under CITES and other treaties and conventions.
- Continued on next page.



What do we do? Continued

Our members are involved in numerous activities.

The AVCB contributes to the Policy Advisory Council (PAC) by drafting policies relating to conservation biology. AVCB members have been involved in the development of many AVA policies including zoo animals, circus animals, hunting and fishing, control of feral animals and utilisation of wildlife. For a full list of AVA policies, please see the AVA Policy Compendium.

The AVCB has an important role to play in policy development and members are invited to take part in the process.



You are encouraged review it and provide comments. Please email mbanyard@netspeed.com.au

Who What Where? - Answers



Photo D. Hatherly

Cooper Creek (North West Branch) as it junction with Coongie Lakes (left panel). Carapace of Cooper Creek turtle (below)



Photo D. Hatherly

This area is part of Coongie Lakes Wetlands which is a wetland of international importance recognised under the Ramsar Convention. It is one of the largest unregulated water catchments in the world.

It provides habitat for an endemic species of freshwater turtle, known as the Cooper Creek turtle (*Emydura macquarii emotti*) which occur in large numbers here.

http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/managing-natural-resources/wetlands/Coongie_Lakes