

Sustainable eNews

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Editorial: Science and the Art of Politics both affect Decisions about Wildlife Management

by Eugène Lapointe



In August 2003 a legal precedent was set by Judge Gladys Kessler, of the US District Court for the District of Columbia. Judge Kessler ruled in favor of sportsmen in a case involving the importation of Argali sheep trophies to the US. Anti-hunting groups had claimed that sport hunting would endanger or destroy Argali sheep, which are indigenous to Mongolia, Kyrgyztan and Tajikistan. Judge Kessler's landmark opinion is that because of hunting, the sheep populations shall thrive because poaching shall not take over as a means of income for local people. Legal hunting of the trophy animal actually preserves its chances in the wild, since it exists as a protected species whose benefactors have a significant economic incentive to remain in control of its destiny. Local people depend largely on revenues realized from sport hunters, and much of that is focused on conservation measures, including those that prevent poaching.

Judge Kessler's decision has resulted in preserving the powers of the US Fish and Wildlife Service to issue import permits for trophy Argali sheep. The extension and the implications of this decision are that wildlife managers, not non-governmental organizations, are given the legal right and the encouragement to continue to manage and care for the future of wildlife populations.

Contrast this situation with two others; legal hunting and trade of the products of harp and ringed seals are proceeding in Canada, despite the immense economic and cultural campaigns against the hunt being waged by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

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HSUS leadership has used both major newspapers and the Fox News television network to spew their venom about the hunt and about the Canadian government's defense and promotion of it. The message is rife with false reports of seals being endangered, skinned alive, and their products being used in defiance of the opinions of "good people" everywhere. In actuality, control of the seals is absolutely essential to the health of the western Atlantic marine ecosystem. Those fishermen who seasonally hunt seals certainly appreciate the opportunity to make some money at a time of year when the ice prevents net fishing. Yet, the HSUS and the government of Canada are at odds over whether government scientists or protesters should have the power to make management decisions about seals.

The HSUS also is trying to pressure the United States into placing economic sanctions on Iceland, in retaliation for their renewed scientific research on the dietary habits of

minke whales in their waters. Iceland's goal is an eventual return to commercial whaling of at least minke whales, which are very abundant. HSUS demands that the US apply the Pelly Amendment to Iceland, claiming that the country is "diminishing the conservation effect" of the International Whaling Commission. The US law would then forbid the import of any fish products from Iceland, which would be a blow to their economy. Interestingly, this may never happen. The US government is fully aware that the Pelly sanctions would likely be ruled in violation of the World Trade Organization's rules about trade and national sovereignty. The situation is similar to that in Canada - government scientists shall oversee the hunt, and ignore political pressures to end it. IWMC congratulates both Canada and Iceland, and wishes them both the best as they conduct wildlife management through science, rather than through pressure politics. □

CITES Committee Meetings

by Jaques Berney

The 13th meeting of the Plants Committee and the 19th meeting of the Animals Committee of CITES were held from 12 to 15 and from 18 to 21 August 2003 respectively, in Geneva, Switzerland. As they were the first meetings of these Committees after the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Santiago, they may be considered as transitional or preparatory for the work to be done in view of the 13th CoP meeting. CoP 13 will take place in Bangkok, Thailand, from 2 to 14 October 2004, as formally announced by the CITES Secretariat in its Notification to the Parties No. 2003/046 dated 15 August 2003.

As all documents to be submitted for consideration at CoP13 will have to be communicated to the Secretariat by 5 May 2004, needless to say that the time available to the Committees to achieve their work will be extremely short. The Committees will have only one more meeting to finalize the numerous documents they are directed to prepare by Resolutions and Decisions of the Conference of the Parties.

This lack of time was repeatedly underlined by many people and though several Parties expressed concern to the Secretariat, none did it strongly enough to engage it to even envisage that it would be convenient to postpone CoP13 for a few months.

One of the main items for consideration by both Committees was the review of the criteria for amendment of Appendices I and II of the Convention. The difficult discussions expected did not occur, thanks to the preparatory work of the Chairman of the Plants Committee, which was essentially endorsed first by her Committee and then by the Animals Committee. In view of the short time available until the date of submission of a draft resolution, it was proposed, and accepted, to inverse the tasks of the Committees. Instead of trying to finalize the drafting of criteria and to assess their applicability to an array of taxa, as directed by the Conference of the Parties and confirmed by the Standing Committee, both Committees established a list of species to be assessed against the criteria, as partially changed by the Criteria Working Group at CoP12, to determine where the criteria might appear as not being applicable. The review of these species should be conducted until the end of next October and their results, as well as recommendations for changing the criteria, should be sent by the same date to the Chairmen of the Committees. After consultation of the Parties, a draft resolution should be submitted to the Standing Committee for consideration at its March 2004 meeting and then to the Conference of the Parties by 5 May. This appeared to be the only way to cope with the deadlines but this does not mean that the Conference of the Parties will be able to find a two-thirds majority to adopt revised criteria.

Both Committees considered many other issues and a number of working groups were established to examine them in depth. Several of these working groups will continue their work intersessionally, with the hope that draft resolutions or decisions could be prepared at the next meetings for CoP13. The Plants Committee decided to meet in Namibia in February 2004 but the Animals Committee has not yet agreed on the time and venue of its meeting, as Namibia is not in a position to host both meetings.



In the meeting of the Plants Committee, an interesting discussion took place about the devil's claw (*Harpagophytum* spp.), a genus, not listed in the CITES Appendices, important for its medicinal properties and as a source of revenue for very poor populations of southern Africa. The Committee agreed that the actions taken pursuant to decisions of CoP12 were a model example of how range States, regional representatives and consumer countries could work together to provide recommendations on how to exploit a wild resource sustainably. However, the Committee also noted that the last sentence of the paragraph on the devil's claw, in a press release issued by the Secretariat prior to the meeting, was misleading (it referred to over-exploitation) and recommended its removal (obviously too late).

It is worth noting also that in parallel with each of the meetings, the Nomenclature Committee held a session on plant and animal issues, respectively. Regarding plants, there was unanimity to express concerns about the contents of Resolution Conf.12.11 on Standard nomenclature, while the discussions were rather harsh about animals, with the zoologist of the Committee and the representatives of the Secretariat rejecting most critics. Some action from the Parties is expected before CoP13.

In general however, the discussions did not generate severe exchanges of controversial views and were well conducted by their respective Chairman, not necessarily an easy task, especially for the new Chairman of the Animals Committee. Both meetings were concluded by interesting excursions organized by the Swiss Ministry for Foreign Affairs to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the signature of CITES. This afforded excellent opportunities to strengthen contacts between individuals and to favour exchanges of views on various issues, not necessarily related to CITES. □

Congratulations Iceland!

IWMC joins Norway and other pro-whaling NGOs and nations in offering hearty congratulations to Iceland on their scientific research vessel's first take of a minke whale on August 18, 2003. It has been a long hard diplomatic road for Iceland since whaling for fin and sei ceased in 1989.

There are estimated to be some 43,000 minke whales in Iceland's territorial waters, and the present planned take of 38 animals this season shall in no way affect that stock. However, the data to be recovered from this research effort shall be part of a record to be shared with the

scientific community and with fellow Parties to the IWC.

The Atlantic Ocean is an intensely fished ecosystem, and it is vitally important that on-going research be conducted in order that those nations whose nationals fish its waters are well informed regarding all the components therein. Iceland shows courageous and staunch adherence to the principles of sovereign rights and scientifically justified marine systems management. We wish Iceland all the best in this endeavor and in future research and scientifically justified harvest programs. □

Letters to Iceland

The editor of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society Newsletter recently asked readers to write letters to Iceland, deploring that nation's decision to begin scientific whaling. The newsletter requested that readers sign their names to a letter conveniently composed for them by the WDCS, and then forward it to three Iceland government officials, whose e-mail addresses were supplied. The prime minister and the ministers of fisheries and foreign affairs were all to be targeted and of course, the WDCS requested that copies of letters sent should also be forwarded back to themselves, in order that they could confirm the magnitude of the response. A subsequent WDCS newsletter thanks those who responded in this manner to their information, and claims that the Icelandic government received many (unconfirmed #) of these letters regarding their whaling plans.

This formula for "protest" and the manner in which the response is tallied, is classic in modern animal rights and environmentalist political action campaigns. The goal is not so much to impress Iceland, as to impress the United States with the alleged magnitude of the response, a political lever with which to continue to bend US foreign policy regarding Iceland's whaling program. The ultimate goal is domestic political intimidation.

The Associated Press released an opinionated piece, by Jane Wardell, that echoes similar "fears", concerns and objections. "Scientists, eateries ready for whale hunt" (August 9, 2003), begins with information on whale cuisine and whale restaurants in Reykjavik, and continues with statements from Iceland's scientists about minke whale abundance and dietary preferences. The 43,000 minke whales in Iceland's waters will be sampled in order to determine what fish species they are consuming, and in what tonnage.

Only 38 minke whales will be sampled in this first year's scientific research program, however, making it highly unlikely that the remaining animals will ever perceive that boats are something to be feared. Wardell, however, claims that the nation's whale watching industry fears it will suffer because whales will become wary of tour vessels.

The article concludes with an alleged statement by a tourist to Iceland, that she was glad she could go on a whale watch there this year, because she would have "more chance of seeing a whale now than ...next year."


Journalists love to do these pieces. Their formula is to present and contrast two polarized views of an issue, thereby ostensibly meeting criteria for "a fair and balanced perspective". The problem with this journalistic approach, however, is that "truth" about human perceptions of Iceland's whale research program is not necessarily the goal or the achievement of the article. Uninformed readers will conclude that Iceland should not resume whaling because those in other

countries disapprove, and that public opinion, not scientifically derived data, should drive national policies on whale management.

Iceland is planning to conduct scientific research on the impact of minke and other species of whales on the fisheries in its territorial waters, and to add such data to the world collection of such information. The US, NAMMCO, the IWC, and the EU shall all receive information derived from the Icelandic whale studies, and the by-products of whale research shall be sold as human food products in Iceland. Iceland's fishing industry and Iceland's whale populations are already in a relationship that needs to be more fully understood, in order for all to "live happily ever after". It does not necessarily follow that Iceland's tourism industry would suffer any adverse effects from Iceland's moderate whaling program, now or in the years to come, regardless of the innuendoes thrown out by journalists or professional whale protectionists. □

NGOs: The truth about non-governmental organizations comes out

(Source from the Far Eastern Economic Review, 21 August 2003)

 One thing that struck us with the recent announcement of a report on non-governmental organizations, prepared by SustainAbility, a consultancy group, and commissioned by the United Nations, is the sheer diversity of such groups. But despite the number of NGOs, the public often fails to distinguish between them, happy to ascribe to all the virtue it expects of all do-gooders. Yet it turns out that donors don't always get the full bang for their "investment" in charitable goals.

Surprisingly, it seems that accountability and transparency are issues on which several NGOs are found wanting--something you wouldn't have expected since they are advocates of improved corporate governance in the private sector and transparency in government. Indeed, given how large the NGO sector is, it is disturbing to learn that there isn't better governance generally. SustainAbility puts the value of the NGO sector at over \$1 trillion a year. A hundredth of that much money badly spent is still a lot of money squandered.

For us, the report reinforces a suspicion of hypocrisy we've long held about many NGOs. No question, many provide real value for donor dollars--NGOs are a diverse lot, after all. There are too many of them to name, but you know which ones they are. They are those working to improve human rights in the many dark corners of the world; those that work on behalf of children; those that appreciate the delicate calculations man must make to exploit his world in order to survive and prosper. And so on.

But such groups are outmatched by those for whom activism is almost a religion. There is perhaps no better example of this than those that militate for reducing carbon-dioxide emissions through the Kyoto protocol--despite

the fact that the science isn't incontrovertible, and that the cost of compliance reportedly could pay for what every Third World child really needs: clean water. Then there are those who argue for keeping the environment completely intact and nature unsullied by human hands. (We know who they are because we get their press releases--previously sent by fax but now by e-mail.) How long would they last in an original Sarawak longhouse?

SustainAbility's report brings welcome debate to the condition of many NGOs. "Investors" in charities may now want to ask if many of their causes don't deserve reform themselves.□

Letter from a Trapper by Paul Tufts

(Source: The Fur Institute of Canada - Trappers: Stewards of the Land)

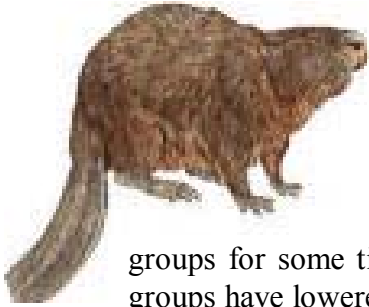
Dear Friends,

I am the oldest in a family of 15 children, and the only one who became a trapper-hunter-fisherman. Although my father had some influence on me as a hunter, my attraction to trapping came at an early age via a Métis trapper who lived in my community. He had no children, but wishes to pursue the traditions of his father - traditions that required a son in the bow of his canoe while trapping, fishing, and hunting. I became his substitute son, and he became my hero and role model. He taught me how to trap muskrats and mink in the marsh behind my home. He encouraged my trapping ventures by giving me an old canoe to repair and by secretly placing beavers in my beginner trap sets. He was admired in the

community as a renowned otter trapper who gladly shared his vast knowledge of wildlife.

The seed he planted in my soul took root. I decided to become a professional trapper, against the wishes of my parents, who wanted to arrange for me to go to college. I soon learned that it was difficult to earn a living solely from trapping, so with the blessing of my parents, I chose a career in wildlife biology. In this profession I could apply my trapping skills to the management and research of my beloved furbearers. As life rolled on I also became a trapper education instructor, a part-time fur farmer, the president of the Trappers Association of Nova Scotia, and finally, a director on the Board of the Fur Institute of Canada.

During this journey, I learned about the importance of trapping as a wildlife management tool. Furbearers are a renewable resource and respond well to the modern science of wildlife management, which ensures the health and welfare of animal populations.



Successful trappers are among the best outdoorsmen in existence.

Trapping has been under attack by animal rights groups for some time. Activities of anti-fur groups have lowered fur prices so much that many no longer trap. Opponents of trapping, as well as some folks who do not understand the entire situation, question the need for trapping. Even if trapping is not needed, and most wildlife managers believe it is, trapping is a legitimate activity that removes excess animals from the wildlife population. Sound wildlife management practices allow the harvest of excess animals because wildlife is a renewable resource. Trapping helps keep wildlife populations balanced with their habitats. If beavers become too numerous, there will not be enough trees to support them and they will literally eat themselves out of house and home.

I have often pondered the question, "Why do I trap?" This trapping obsession cannot be explained by monetary gains, which are so marginal and uncertain. I have to look at my ancestors within the process of evolution to explain the Creator's design of human behaviour. Studies of skulls and teeth indicate that human beings are omnivorous hunters and gatherers descended from a lifeline that is several million years old. Science dictates that

the human brain couldn't have evolved to its large size without the consumption of protein-rich meat. To assure survival and development, the Creator surely had to cause the evolution of natural instincts, desires, and contentment in association with hunting and gathering. I cannot conceive that a few centuries of modern living would completely erase instincts that are millions of years old. I believe modern man still pursues these natural instincts, even in unnatural settings where substitute behaviours satisfy these urges.

I hope also looked at the morality of trapping, since modern man has detached himself from nature and often considers animal use immoral. For me, morality implies a spiritual connection to goodness and respect according to conscience, God, or the Creator. My understandings and feelings for nature are central to my soul - while seemingly absent in modern humans who have detached themselves from natural processes.

I am perplexed by the extreme view that says the Creator made a mistake in his design of natural predator - prey relationships. I find great comfort in the belief that, as a trapper, I am a predator in the Creator's design of nature's surpluses. At the same time, I realize that because of current extraordinary human population numbers, man's predatory activities need to be regulated and controlled out of respect for the Creator's design.

Thus, spiritually, on the trapline, I feel that I am one with nature.

I hope these personal notes help to explain my personal point of view.

Thank you for reading. □

Flawed Science fails Acceptance

Stephen Palumbi, of Stanford University, and Joe Roman, of Harvard, have proposed that their findings of impressive diversity in the DNA of humpback whales in the North Atlantic are evidence that the pre-exploitation numbers of those animals were much higher than any previously derived estimates of their original population strength. According to extrapolations from Palumbi and Roman's new technique, the original western Atlantic humpback population was some 240,000 animals. Unfortunately for the researchers, even their environmentalist supporters doubt the veracity of this claim, although if it could be shown to have validity, it would be influential in preventing any rationale for resumption of commercial hunting of at least Atlantic humpbacks within the next millennium.

What are the problems with this DNA diversity approach to previous population levels?

For one thing, the historical record (ships' logs and whale oil commerce reports dating back to the 1500s) does not support harvest of humpback whales in numbers even remotely close to those that would be necessary to have resulted in the verified low levels of animals by the 1980s. The apparent genetic diversity may reflect the species' survival over several million years, with gene flow between the Atlantic and the Pacific possibly accounting for some of it. Another problem is that the authors also used estimates of rates of natural mutations in the animals' genes as they tried to arrive at estimates of population numbers, but the fossil upon which they base their time line for these changes is not a humpback whale, and consequently, they have been criticized for using it for this purpose.

Does the name Palumbi ring a bell with anyone? Remember some years back, the "news flash" that researchers Palumbi and Baker used DNA samples of alleged whale meat in Japanese markets to declare that the Japanese were catching and selling protected whale species after the "temporary moratorium" on commercial whaling? The researchers bought samples of whale meat, took them back to their hotel room, allegedly did exacting DNA analysis under less than laboratory conditions, and then claimed that Japan was cheating on the moratorium. This, in a time when there were still frozen supplies of fin whale product from Iceland in Japan from before the moratorium, and in a time when there was no recognized DNA registry of any cetacean species occurring around Japan.

At the time of that Palumbi and Baker "disclosure", whale protectionists were anxiously trying to prove that Japan could not be trusted to honestly conduct scientific research in the Southern Ocean or anywhere else, and that Japanese whalers were actively violating the moratorium through coastal whaling or through illicit trade.

The hype that resulted from the Palumbi / Baker disclosures back in the '90s may well be reflected again today in the claims of Palumbi and Roman that humpback whales are more severely depleted in the Atlantic, compared to their alleged original population strength, than anyone had previously estimated. The implication of their study is that any resumption of hunting (perhaps by the Icelanders?) would further damage their chances at recovery.

Humpback whales are now conservatively thought to number about 10,000 animals in the western Atlantic. They have increased their numbers rather dramatically in the last twenty years, and it is thought that they have reached pre-exploitation strength, once again. Because of modern fishing by man, today's ocean is vastly different than that of even two hundred years ago. The future of cetaceans and fish resources will depend on wise, biology-based management decisions that are grounded both in history and science.

Let us not accept any off the wall claims that any species should be forever off-limits as we try to balance human needs with today's stark oceanic realities. □

Gamewardens, Conservation Officers, All working to protect Sustainable Resources

There are many reports from around the world that highlight just how vitally important are those professional men and women who wear the badges of their state, provincial, or national wildlife law enforcement agencies. These dedicated officers risk their lives to make sure that wildlife and forest resources are not illegally taken and sold on the black market, or disguised as normal trade. Some call themselves "gamewardens" but in truth, they are often police officers with full powers to investigate and arrest those who break any laws, although they concentrate on conservation issues.

This July, the North American Wildlife Officers' Enforcement Association, or NAWOEA, met in St. John's, Newfoundland, for their annual get-together. Some 500 Canadian and American officers congregated to pay their respects to the 7 of their number who died in the line of duty since last year's meeting. They shared information on poaching networks, and attended seminars on how to more efficiently investigate and prevent illegal trade in wildlife resources. Our congratulations to the officers of NAWOEA for their dedication to the job of protecting North American wildlife.

Reports that are shared among "game wardens" of the world include those who serve in Cambodia, where the fight is to protect forests from illegal logging, on the beaches of Florida, where wardens protect the nests of sea turtles from those who would steal the eggs and sell them on the black market, and in the Black Sea area, where officers work to protect giant sturgeon from those who would illegally take them for the roe. In the UK, there is a significant illegal trade in the eggs of protected birds, especially raptors such as osprey, eagles and falcons. Officers do their best to protect these species by ferreting out those who steal eggs from nests, and then smuggle them into or out of Europe, in a vast network of black market activity. In these times of rapid communication, wildlife protection includes expertise in combating crime through use of satellite phones, computer networks, and video recordings of illegal transactions. It's more than fast car chases and gunfights, and today's wildlife officers have become experts in surveillance techniques that would have astounded their predecessors. Our gratitude and congratulations to all the world's "gamewardens" for their efforts and especially, their successes. □

Movies as the message: When Popular Films promote Animal Rights

This year we have witnessed another couple of ridiculous movies that promote animal rights, vegetarianism, and a distrust of and disrespect for science. "Finding Nemo" was bad enough, and now "Legally Blond 2" is struggling for box office notoriety, although the film is not doing as well as its producers may have hoped. The lead character, played by Reese Witherspoon, is physically attractive, slender, and allegedly intelligent, but these attributes are misused in a weak-minded plot that concentrates on protesting the use of animals in scientific research. The entire story is apparently inspired by PETA, and the viewer is encouraged to admire the spunk of this woman attorney who objects to the use of dogs in cosmetic testing. Films such as this are



"test cases" for animal rights advocates, who use them as tactical tools in their quest to impress politicians with their popular appeal.

IWMC congratulates Michael Fumento, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, in Washington. His critique of "Legally

Blond 2" was printed in the Raleigh News Observer, in North Carolina. Fumento makes a number of excellent points for those who care to think about the technique of using popular movies as social movement messengers in today's society. Fumento's insights include the following: while the movie's lead character is

extremely attractive, and presumably a role model for today's young woman, she is "misled" into believing that "all animal testing is not only immoral but worthless". Fumento notes that PETA features a rave review of the film on its website, because the story line has the lead character campaigning at the highest levels in society to outlaw the use of animals in testing for reasons of human health and safety. He also notes that the old trick of focusing on testing for cosmetics is used to then justify objection to all animal testing, on the alleged grounds that human and animal physiology are just not similar enough to one another to justify sacrificing animals to satisfy FDA requirements. In addition, he notes that PETA would not even approve of animal testing for animal benefit, as in the case of heartworm medication for dogs.

There is only one problem with the brilliance of Michael Fumento. His work will probably not be read or appreciated by the very audience whose members need it the most - the impressionable young women who may consider Reese Witherspoon's movie character as much a "hero figure" as that of Erin Brocovich, played by Julia Roberts.

Nevertheless, we congratulate Michael Fumento, and hope he continues to point out the logical and scientific flaws in all these popular media messages, until someday, so many people believe him that attendance at movies such as "Legally Blonde 2" will decline and such films shall be historically regarded as examples of animal rightist cult behavior of the late 20th century. □

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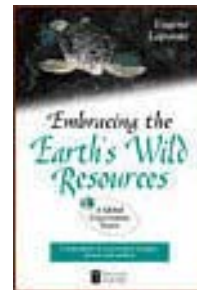
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