

COP 13

Conservation TRIBUNE

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WildMaid Awareness

It is hard to doubt the sincerity of Cindy, the WildAid model who so eloquently expressed support for her sponsor during the official COP 13 reception party on Sunday evening. Cindy explained afterwards how there should be more “awareness” about wildlife issues.

While Cindy was not personally aware of the alternatives of sustainable use and total protection, she was sure that WildAid does its very best to help wildlife.

WildAid’s activities, of course, make much more sense if you start from the assumption that people don’t matter much at all. People, that is, who make a subsistence level living from selling wildlife artifacts or whose culture is based on interaction with fauna and flora. The people that do matter to the wealthy American group are those who provide it with celebrity endorsements. As it seeks publicity and public support, glamour is WildAid’s substitute for rigorous scientific analysis. Enter Cindy...

Cindy was also unaware how WildAid is financed and how it operates. Originally an offshoot of the controversial Environmental

Investigation Agency (EIA), WildAid is controlled by Suwanna Gauntlett, heiress of the Upjohn pharmaceuticals business (now part of Pfizer). Gauntlett runs the Barbara Delano Foundation that, in addition to financing WildAid, donates large sums of money to other radical campaign groups. (See bdfoundation.org and wildaid.org).

Sources have told Tribune that WildAid activists have recently embarrassed U.S. diplomats in Cambodia by taking the law into their own hands and confiscating the property of individuals they alleged were involved in illegal wildlife activities.

Wildlife conservation is not a beauty pageant. It is a complex arena of evaluations and choices. It demands careful consideration by all those with the authority, or the ability, to make a difference. CITES has the task of sifting through the arguments, the data, the practicalities and the consequences of placing species onto its Appendices.

The reception was fun, but CITES delegates must now focus on the merits of the COP 13 proposals. □

Congratulations to Namibia and South Africa

Committee I have adopted by consensus proposals from Namibia and South Africa that five “surplus male” black rhinos should be removed as trophies each year, after a convincing presentation by each Party of its management strategies and the state of the stock. The males to be removed by trophy hunting are identified as non-contributors to the conservation of the species, as they are either post-breeding age or in a condition that excludes the possibility that they can breed due to various disabilities.

Some of the most poignant arguments for the proposals have to do with animal welfare concerns; these old males engage in territorial fighting and suffer wounds, or deliver wounds to incoming young males, and even to females and juveniles, during breeding season. Therefore, it is best to remove these animals to prevent serious injuries and untimely deaths, as these particular males are no longer able to breed their females

and thus, their time of genetic contribution is over. NGO objections that these animals should instead be transferred to other areas where black rhino were once endemic or are presently scarce in order to rebuild stocks was rejected as an impractical conservation strategy.

IWMC congratulates Namibia and South Africa for the exquisite detail and practicality of their management and oversight, data bases, and their skills in individual animal identification. They have brought their black rhino stocks back to an increasing condition, and are expertly maintaining them in harmony with their natural environments.

The Chair of Committee I is also to be congratulated for her wise and fair handling of the debate and the consensus decision. The adoption of these proposals was a well deserved victory for conservation and sustainable use. □

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Whale Sharks, Eco-Tourism, and Fishermen

In the Philippines, there is a small community whose people are out of work and have no prospects for alternative ways to make a decent living. The 1,000 people of Barangay Guiwanon are a traditional fishing community. The high point of their life used to be fishing for whale sharks in their coastal waters, where from January through April of each year, they harvested approximately 60 animals. Men, women, and children all participated in butchering the huge fish, and in cutting the meat into pieces small enough to be air-dried on the beach. The whale shark provided direct subsistence, and the excess was sold to traders who came into town and bought it in bulk. This commercial aspect enhanced the local economy, and was their main livelihood, according to a piece in *Business World*, September 24th issue. These people apparently lived in relative comfort until 1998, when the government of the Philippines issued Fisheries Administrative Order No. 193 that banned the catching, selling, purchasing, possessing, transporting, and exporting of whale sharks.

Barangay Guiwanon residents were contacted by outsiders in 1997. They were told that it would be possible to make a lot of money by becoming tour guides for a whale shark watch operation. Such a deal never materialized, however, and then the next year came the ban. Times have continued to be hard, and *Business World* notes that in 2003, a group of former whale shark hunters in Guiwanon petitioned their local government to lobby for the lifting of the ban on whale shark hunting. The ban has not been lifted. The whale shark, (*Rhincodon typus*) is claimed by the WWF to be “dwindling” throughout its habitat. The animal is subject of a campaign by WWF that uses its great size and alleged scarcity as a symbol of concern for all shark species, worldwide. This species, listed in Appendix II of CITES, is now being used as a popular icon

without regard for those people who have lived in harmony with it for centuries. The government of the Philippines appears to have bowed to pressure from protectionist groups, and made the decision to sacrifice its own people’s welfare in order to preclude public relations problems for their tourism industry.

This is not a unique scenario. How many times have protectionist groups offered hunters or fishermen the “opportunity” to stop their use of a species and instead, become tour guides, or just sit and wait for handouts from their government? It happened in eastern Canada during the intense campaigns against the hunting of whitecoat harp seals. Canadian fishermen declined the offer, and their government fortunately supported their continued take of older harps, now an over-abundant species.

In southern Africa, the Kalahari Bushmen have been “kicked off” their traditional hunting grounds because their activities are not attractive to tourists. Their human rights have been disregarded, and a global eco-tourism has been given priority.

The people of Barangay Guiwanon are not part of a tourist operation, but they are victims of it. Their human rights have been ignored by their government, in favor of an alleged benefit to the whale shark tourism industry in areas removed from their village. There is no evidence that their former harvest was detrimental to whale shark stocks in Philippine waters, or that the ban has resulted in any change to stock status. IWMC urges CITES participants to be mindful of the needs of people to continue their traditional relationships with their environments. Eco-tourism is not an ethical excuse to displace them from activities that are not environmentally destructive, and that are their rightful cultural heritage. □

Cultural Cocktail Party and Dinner





**Are you ready
to rumble?**



**Eugene Lapointe and Jacques Berney
of IWMC World Conservation Trust will host a lively
evening of traditional Thai entertainment at
6:30 pm on Tuesday October 5 at the Retro Live Café.
Admission is by invitation or with media accreditation.**

Free Wildlife Postcards

	 <p>Visit the IWMC exhibition booth and pick up your free postcards showing a variety of wildlife from Thailand.</p>
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IWMC's booth also contains a range of information
about the sustainable use of wildlife.