

Again, What *is* CBSG, anyway?

This is an introduction to a brief summary of the CBSG Annual Conference Steering Committee news and the Working Groups which met during the three days of the event. The first paragraphs are from an edited version of a piece of one of the working group reports. Ed Em. SRW

The strength of CBSG lies in its **neutral ties to both *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation**. Despite popular belief CBSG is not only about zoos and captive breeding! Nor are these two spheres in conflict; species conservation strategies need to consider both *in situ* and *ex situ* strategies. For example, *in situ* conservation plans should drive *ex situ* conservation plans, and there is a need to break down barriers between the so-called *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation communities. This also does not mean that each person in the CBSG community needs to have expertise in both *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation to make CBSG function effectively as there is current diversity of interest, enthusiasm and expertise to cover this. Individuals and subsets of CBSG may focus more on one than the other but, as a whole, CBSG has worked and will continue to work across the spectrum of species conservation approaches.

CBSG is part of IUCN so it is not and cannot be an advocacy group for the zoo and aquarium community. If CBSG appeared to be zoo and aquarium advocates, then CBSG would be a far less effective partner with the zoo and aquarium community and would need to change its image. CBSG must have neutrality in order to bring together diverse groups to find a common way forward and, in the end, to be trusted. In addition, *ex situ* does not exclusively define the zoo and aquarium community of today, or even for the last twenty years in some regions of the world due to the trend, little known by some, but having been going on for last two decades, of assisting with money, manpower and expertise a variety of field (or wild) projects, not all which involve reintroduction or even animals. Zoos and aquariums are increasingly involved in projects and activities other than *ex situ* conservation, and others outside of the zoo and aquarium community are involved in *ex situ* conservation. The difference between *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation should be recognized, but the synergy between the two disciplines also must be acknowledged and recognised.

In situ and *ex situ* conservation are increasingly linked. We should focus more on this linkage than in trying to separate the two or to define them separately. Some people outside of CBSG (even within IUCN) perceives CBSG as somehow biased towards zoos, which is not the case.

CBSG needs to do a better job of educating those outside of CBSG that CBSG is **an unbiased advocate for wildlife**. Target groups for this education programme should be other Specialist Groups, conservationists in certain countries and

regions, and even some CBSG members in some regions which have remained wedded to the idea of CBSG as a zoo specialist group, despite having an active regional network of CBSG strongly linked to *in situ* conservation projects, practically in their backyard.

One way in which this image correction could be accomplished would be to have more Specialist Groups represented on the CBSG Steering Committee, and/or by inviting other Specialist Group Chairs or representatives from other IUCN programs to CBSG meetings, such as future CBSG Steering Committee meetings.

One of our CBSG members, Evan Bloomer, treated us to a bit of a rant about the terms *in situ* and *ex situ* and the difficulties they generate in our current conservation scenario. He made a plea for other terms to describe *in situ/ex situ*, alluding to the misunderstandings that come from them. He suggested "intensively managed populations" as a more accurate descriptor of populations that are under intensive care, whether in a traditional zoo, or more open wildlife parks, or national parks, or in the "wild" as such. Intensively managed populations range from those under very intensive management (of diets, disease, environment, mates, etc) to those that are less intensively managed.

Consider elephants in India, for example. There are more Asian elephants in India than any other Asian country and possibly more than all put together. Yet, because of habitat decline and the growth of human populations, the range size for elephants has shrunk and elephants are increasingly leaving appropriate wild to forage for food and peace. They disrupt the lives of local people who complain about homes, crops and family members being trashed by elephants, and the government has attempted to "manage" the wild population of elephants in some areas. There have been multiple translocations which must qualify, if anything does, as intensive management.

Bob Lacy commented in recent mail that the "ideal aim is to get the populations to be able to thrive without management, within natural systems". -- This is the ultimate objective described also by SSC IUCN "the securing of long-term populations of species in natural ecosystems and habitats wherever possible."

So "what is CBSG?" CBSG is intensively focused people working intensively to bring about the above aim. Full stop.

The discussions from which this introduction has been crafted reaffirmed CBSG's dual role and highlighted needs to promote that.

