

is dedicated to profiling the men and women who drive SSC and the global species conservation agenda. All are chairs of SSC's Specialist Groups, Task Forces or Working Groups covering species from polar bears to orchids. They devote their time and energy on a voluntary basis to coordinate the work of their respective groups of experts, ensuring their collective knowledge and expertise feeds into the broader conservation agenda. All are committed to reversing the extinction crisis by providing the science and knowledge needed for sound conservation action, for species and their habitats.

These profiles aim to highlight the expertise, enthusiasm, and commitment shown by these leaders who have an immense impact at all levels, from running grass-roots projects to influencing global conservation policy decisions.

Among the profiles emerges a fascinating range of work including guiding field projects on Asian rhinos, reintroducing bison to former natural habitat, running breeding programs for tapirs, devising ways to reduce human-wildlife conflict, and advising on sustainable harvest levels for a wealth of species from crocodiles to medicinal plants.

Martin Brooks



When the African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) was formed in 1991, Martin Brooks assumed the chairmanship. His association with African rhinos had begun more than 10 years earlier when he was an ecologist with the Natal Parks Board in the Hluhluwe and Umfolozi Game Reserves. Martin's entire career was spent with this organization, which later became Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, until his early retirement as an executive director in 2004.

The 30 to 40 AfRSG members represent a mix of scientific experts and field practitioners.

"The conservation context in which we work has one of five African rhino subspecies conserved almost exclusively in areas managed by either State authorities or the private sector, and where the taxa are either on the brink of extinction – the West African black and northern white rhinos – or are recovering towards long-term viability," explains Martin.

"All are rated as Critically Endangered except the southern white rhino which now numbers over 11,000. Biological management to enhance population growth, translocation to expand distribution into areas within their historical range and security are therefore the major foci. The effective implementation of rhino programs is facilitated by the inclusion and active participation in the Specialist Group of representatives of all the major Range States and conservation agencies, including the private sector."

Most of the immediate challenges facing Africa's rhinos and therefore the Group relate to the SSC objective to use scientific information to influence policies and management decisions. The revision of the South African Black Rhino Plan is nearing completion, and those of other Range States will soon be evaluated. Extensive guidance is, and will continue to be given, and techniques refined to ensure that populations are effectively monitored and managed to optimize population growth rates and ensure accurate population estimates. Following on from the 13th Conference of the Parties to CITES in 2004, the Group will be compiling a report on the status of Africa's rhinos and submitting it to the CITES Secretariat in advance of all their conferences. This should maintain the international profile of these critically important taxa. Major funding agencies will continue to be assisted in determining priorities and identifying the significance of projects to long-term taxon conservation. The AfRSG will continue to provide high-level strategic advice for all Africa's rhinos, but particu-



larly for areas where rhinos are close to extinction. The political neutrality of the IUCN SSC and the non-partisan views of its rhino specialists are often required to broker agreements or provide strategic direction.

The Group also focuses on promoting conservation by biodiversity users – SSC objective two. Priorities include refining conservation models that are appropriate for rural African communities, and an evaluation of the controls and approach adopted for black rhino trophy hunting by South Africa. SSC's objective relating to capacity building will be addressed through extensive advice, both strategic and technical, given to the Range States, and the extensive transfer of knowledge that will occur at the AfRSG's biennial meetings in 2006, 2008 and 2010. Emphasis is placed on assisting the Range States to develop their own "critical mass" of expertise as this will provide increased self-sufficiency in decision-making and help increase the profile of rhino conservation in their countries.

Galen B. Rathbun



Galen Rathbun's research career has focused on mammalian behavioral ecology and conservation, including a long-standing focus on African mammals. It was therefore a logical step in 2002 to gather like-minded colleagues to form the Afrotheria Specialist Group. The Group's focus is on the smaller and lesser known afrotheres (hyraxes, aardvark, sengis, tenrecs, and golden moles) because the larger representatives (elephants and sea cows) have their own Specialist Groups.

"Most people, including many biologists, are not familiar with the smaller afrotheres, much less their conservation issues, so foremost is a need to educate people. We will continue to focus much of our educational effort through our website (<http://www.calacademy.org/research/bmammals/afrotheria/ASG.html>), where our newsletter can also be found," says Galen.

"Next year we will fill the golden mole and tenrec gaps on the website, and continue to update other sections. We also plan on producing one or two

newsletters a year, which reach readers in Africa who do not have Internet access. Popular magazine articles will also continue to be an important educational tool, and next year one of our members will write a popular article on tenrecs for *Africa Geographic* magazine."

"The second thrust for action for our Group is providing expert advice to all that seek it, including for the IUCN Red List and the Global Mammal Assessment. Of course the basis of our expertise is research, which our members will continue to pursue and we will continue to endorse, especially when it generates information useful to conservation efforts. Research is especially important because so little is known about afrotheres, and without information, conservation needs and priorities are difficult to define. As we gain a better understanding of afrotheres, we will explore ways of producing an integrated conservation plan for this unusual group of African mammals," explains Galen.

Claude Gascon



Dr Claude Gascon is Senior Vice-President for Regional Programs at Conservation International. He also holds a Visiting Professor position with the Department of Ecology at the Instituto de Pesquisas da Amazonia (National Amazon Research Institute) and is a research associate with the Biodiversity Programs at the National Museum of Natural History. Prior to joining Conservation International, Claude was the project director and scientific coordinator for the Biological Dynamics of Forest Fragments Project (BDFFP) in Brazil for six years. He also directed a large-scale research and conservation project investigating the distribution and abundance of vertebrate species in the southwestern Amazon region.

Claude completed a master's degree in Ecology at Université du Québec à Montréal in Canada and his doctorate in Ecology at Florida State University. His research areas include biodiversity patterns and causes and Amazonian biodiversity, especially amphibians. Claude's research has resulted in more than 50 publications and two books on conservation and forest fragmentation in the Amazon, amphibians, and wildlife management.

Together with his co-chair, Dr Jim Collins, the Amphibian Specialist Group's priority for the current quadrennium is to implement the Amphibian Conservation Action Plan (ACAP) which arose

