

from the September 2005 Amphibian Conservation Summit. The Plan calls for immediate action on:

- Expanded understanding of the causes of amphibian declines and extinctions
- Ongoing documentation of amphibian diversity, and how it is changing
- Development and implementation of long-term conservation programmes
- Emergency responses to immediate crises

"The Action Plan is the most ambitious programme ever developed to combat the extinction of species. Such a response is necessary because the amphibian extinction crisis is unlike anything that the modern world has previously experienced, and a large proportion of amphibian diversity remains undocumented," says Claude.

"The ACAP will require the international community to enter uncharted territory and to take great risks. But the risks of inaction are even greater. There needs to be unprecedented commitment to implementing the Amphibian Conservation Action Plan with accompanying changes in international and local environmental policies that affect this class of vertebrate animals. Otherwise, the 'canaries in the global coalmine' will continue to disappear," he adds.

## Stephen Talbot



As a vegetation ecologist for the national wildlife refuge system in Alaska, Stephen Talbot designs, performs, analyzes and synthesizes scientific studies of the flora and vegetation and their relationship to the environment. Previously, he studied the flora and vegetation of Canada's Northwest Territories. For the past several decades, he has concentrated on the vegetation of the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Islands including the investigation and comparison of plant associations in the North Pacific.

Stephen also serves as a US Representative and Chair of the Arctic Council's Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) Flora Group (CFG) – an eight nation circumpolar flora and vegetation forum ([www.caff.is](http://www.caff.is)). This Group's goal is to promote, encourage, and coordinate internationally the conservation of biodiversity of Arctic flora and vegetation, habitats, and research activities in these fields and to enhance the exchange of information relating to Arctic flora and vegeta-

tion and factors affecting them. The opportunity to work cooperatively with the IUCN will strengthen this goal.

In 1999 the CFG published the *Atlas of Rare Endemic Vascular Plants of the Arctic* as CAFF Technical Report N°3. This identified 96 rare species endemic to the Arctic, established an annotated list of these species, and determined the level of protection afforded these plants.

"At the 3<sup>rd</sup> International CAFF Flora Group Workshop in Helsinki, Finland, May 2005, we began a re-evaluation of the list, particularly species that might be classed as Vulnerable within the IUCN Red List. Fifteen Arctic species were identified as candidates. Over the coming year we plan to compile further data for the IUCN Red List on each of these species and make recommendations as to their conservation," says Stephen.

## Nico Van Strien



Nico Van Strien has been with the Asian Rhino Specialist Group from its first meeting in 1979, first as a member and since 1993, as one of the Program Officers. For the current intersessional period the structure of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG) has been changed and a functional subdivision between Southeast and South Asia has been instituted with a dual leadership. "I will concentrate on Southeast Asia and the issues related to the Javan and Sumatran rhinos and the South Asia Co-chair, who will be appointed in the near future, will deal with Indian rhino conservation in India and Nepal," says Nico.

As before, the AsRSG will concentrate on providing guidance and support for field projects and field personnel, as the survival of the Asian rhinos depends mostly on the dedication and hard work of countless anonymous guards and field workers. The Group will be smaller than previous years but will review options for attracting members from the Asian rhino horn consumer countries to assist in the reduction and eventual elimination of the rhino horn market in East Asia.

For the Indian rhino, the recovery of the populations in Nepal, once the hostilities have ended, and range expansion to former and new habitats in India are the main challenges for the near future. The successful recovery of the Indian



rhino from a state of near extinction a century ago, has so far not been duplicated with the other two Asian species. Both the Javan and the Sumatran rhino populations are still at critically low levels, but good progress has been made to stop the decline and there are early signs of a recovery. The Group will focus on improving the co-operation and coordination between range states and non-range states to continue and accelerate the recovery of the Javans and Sumatrans to viable levels, through ongoing and new *in situ* and *ex situ* efforts. Even if all goes as desired, the Asian Rhino Group will have more than enough to do for the next century.

## Co-Chairs Dave Garshelis & Bruce McLellan



Dave Garshelis (pictured left) studied American black bears for his master's degree and sea otters for his doctorate. Since 1983 he has directed the bear research program for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, with a primary focus on population monitoring. Dave has been co-chair of the Bear Specialist Group since 2004 and hopes to help steer the Group toward better population monitoring.

"Instead of attempting to obtain population estimates, often at great expense but with little precision, the aim should be toward discerning population trend and understanding the factors most closely associated with that trend. In many circumstances, this can be accomplished most efficiently by monitoring changes in geographic range, which can be done through sign surveys and interviews with local officials and residents. Sign surveys yield information on bear presence or absence

with respect to habitat condition, and local interviews are useful for evaluating the effects of poaching and for assessing people's attitudes toward bears," explains Dave.

The Bear Specialist Group is in the process of developing standardized approaches for these efforts, as well as collecting presence/absence data that currently exist from a variety of sources such as camera trapping. Greater awareness of

bear conservation issues can be gained, and capacity building enhanced, by involving many participants, which is why the Group has expanded its membership to include representatives of nearly all countries inhabited by bears. Some members are not bear experts *per se*, but the knowledge and opinions they share, and the information they gain by being part of this Group can only be of benefit to global bear conservation.

Bruce McLellan has studied the ecology and conservation of grizzly bears in southern Canada since 1978. After completing his master's in 1983 and doctorate in 1989 on this research, he began working for the B.C. Ministry of Forests Research Branch. Since that time, he has continued research on grizzly and American black bears as well as the ecosystem of wolves, moose, and threatened mountain caribou. In 1998 he became the president of the International Association for Bear Research and Management, a group of over 700 biologists from over 40 countries. This group is dominated by North Americans, where most research and intensive management of bears occurs, but during his term, Bruce worked toward including more biologists from other parts of the world where more bear species occur but their status is less secure. As a Bear Specialist Group co-chair, he has tried to continue working with biologists that live in the many countries that have bears. He believes that improved communication among biologists will lead toward improved conservation strategies and greater confidence in their implementation. The Group now consists of 11 expert teams covering the species (geographic portions of some species) and themes such as captive bears and the trade in bear parts. Each team has two co-chairs and these all belong to a coordinating committee. Within this structure the chairs and other members have the opportunity to communicate on conservation strategies and implementation plans.

## C. Cormack Gates



Cormack Gates is Associate Professor of Environmental Science in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary, Canada. He holds a PhD in Animal Science (*Wildlife Productivity and Management*) from the University of Alberta and worked as a research and management biologist with the Government of the Northwest Territories, Canada for 18 years before joining the University of

