



Transitioning the Declining Amphibian Populations Task Force (DAPTF)

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Issue #75 of *Froglog* is the last one produced by the Declining Amphibians Task Force (DAPTF). On June 30, 2006 DAPTF will become part of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) Amphibian Specialist Group (ASG), which will continue and expand the DAPTF's mission as an organization devoted to amphibian research and conservation. I want to summarize for you the DAPTF's transition to the ASG so that everyone knows what to expect, make some general comments about amphibian decline research and conservation efforts, and then formally record some thanks to those whose hard work have made the DAPTF possible.

The DAPTF–ASG transition

The DAPTF Seed Grant program will continue under the ASG with Tim Halliday as liaison for all existing projects. Tim will ensure a smooth transition by overseeing ongoing developments and collecting final reports. Rapid Response funds will also continue under the ASG. The DAPTF website will have information for applying for Seed Grants and Rapid Response Funds as well as provide information on the ongoing developments of the new ASG website.

The Declining Amphibian Database (DAD) is maintained on a small, private server with access limited to one person at a time. We are determining if these data can be exported to a larger server for easy access by multiple users. The DAPTF website will have further information regarding access to this resource.

The ASG will require the continuing involvement of Working Group Chairs. Appointments to these positions will be assessed according to guidelines and objectives that will be available shortly. All current Working Group Chairs will be contacted personally.

The DAPTF/CEPF (Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund) grants will continue. Robin Moore at Conservation International (rdmoore@conservation.org) is the contact for information.

Froglog will continue on a bimonthly basis. For now, information on submitting articles and editorial guidelines will be available on the DAPTF website or by email asg@ci.conservation.org. All past issues of *Froglog* will be archived on the DAPTF legacy website and hopefully with the British Library as well. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. will archive all other material concerning the DAPTF.

Details on the ASG itself

The ASG is a unit of the IUCN Species Survival Commission. ASG's mission is to conserve biodiversity by stimulating, developing, and executing practical programs to study, save, restore, and manage amphibians and their habitats around the world. Following the Global Amphibian Summit which produced the Amphibian Conservation Action Plan in 2005, Holly Dublin, Chair of the IUCN's Species Survival Commission, asked Claude Gascon, Senior Vice-President of Regional Programs Division at Conservation International, and myself if we would co-Chair the ASG. We agreed and since then we have worked together with Tim Halliday and Jeanne McKay on augmenting activities of the ASG and merging the DAPTF and ASG. After July 1, 2006, the ASG will have an Advisory Board and an Executive Committee to raise funds, engage policy-makers, and lead programs related to amphibian conservation. Three Divisions will round out the ASG's portfolio: Research, Conservation, and Assessment.

The Research Division most closely reflects the DAPTF's current mission. It will integrate a global network of national and regional working groups to coordinate research into the causes of global amphibian declines and disseminate the results. The Conservation Division complements research with activities directly related to conserving populations and species. The recent effort to develop in-range and out-of-range *ex situ* conservation facilities for Panamanian amphibians is a good example of the kind of project that would fall into this area. The Assessment Division will provide a baseline for research and conservation activities by using the Global Amphibian Assessment (GAA) to evaluate regularly the status of every amphibian species.

Placing the DAPTF within the framework of ASG and under the umbrella of the Species Survival Commission's Specialist Groups ensures that the DAPTF's mission will continue by taking advantage of the international connections and intellectual capital of the IUCN's global network. Practically speaking, it also affords a broad, diverse platform for raising funds for amphibian research, conservation, and assessment. The ASG, through connections with the IUCN and Conservation International, will be able to take advantage of a valuable infrastructure to support amphibians.

Will science and conservation as usual work?

Global amphibian declines are an unfortunate example of the general decline in global biodiversity. The DAPTF's mission has been to determine the nature, extent and causes of amphibian declines throughout the world, and to promote means by which declines can be halted or reversed. It has fulfilled that mission. The fact that an

enlarged institution—the ASG—will continue and expand the DAPTF's mission is a testimony to the vision of our founders.

Within amphibians we have seen in one class of animals a range of pressures including commercial exploitation, competition and predation by exotic species, land use change, global climate change, toxins, and pathogens come to a head in the latter part of the twentieth century. If there is one set of observations that drew the world's attention to the importance of understanding the causes of declines, it was the fact that scientists recorded the disappearance of amphibians in protected areas, wildlife reserves and national parks, areas humans reserved for protecting species and conserving biodiversity. Losses within these enclaves signalled that the strategy of locking away habitat was insufficient for protecting amphibians; “conservation as usual” was not working. Thus, we have to re-examine what we mean by a refuge, and in some cases a refuge of last resort may be an ex situ conservation facility. Scientists must also broaden our view of research programs and projects. “Science as usual” will not solve complex questions like, ‘What is causing amphibian declines?’ Studies by individual investigators help us to understand changes in amphibian population dynamics, but accelerating our progress is most likely done with an integrated, interdisciplinary approach that may incorporate everything from molecular biology to global climate change. Teamwork invites collective knowledge and experience and presents the opportunity for the rapid resolution of complex challenges.

Finally, as stewards of our environment who want to protect our biodiversity, we must examine our values because decisions we make concerning everything from which fuels we use to the land use changes we make affect our environment. Even the most remote places on Earth are no longer completely isolated from human actions. Researchers and supporters of the DAPTF realized all of this and fostered programs that helped bring the problem of global amphibian declines to the world's attention. The DAPTF's vision will live on through the ASG.

Acknowledgements for exceptional service

We owe a special thanks to the Chairmen who preceded me: David Wake, Robert Johnson, W. Ronald Heyer, and James Hanken. All of whom played key roles in starting and sustaining the DAPTF.

The current Board of Directors (Ross A. Alford, Cynthia Carey, Alan Channing, Martha L. Crump, Mario García-París, David M. Green, Tim Halliday, James Hanken, Roberto Ibáñez D., Michael J. Lannoo, Karen R. Lips, James B. Murphy, Rohan Pethiyagoda, George B. Rabb, Michael J. Tyler, David B. Wake) and

previous members of the Board (Sergius Kuzman, Kraig Adler, Mike Tyler, Nevill Passmore, Pim Arntzen, Elke Zimmerman and Jaime Pefaur) have supported the Task Force intellectually and financially and deserve the thanks of our global community.

Tim Halliday, the DAPTF's International Director, deserves special thanks. His commitment to the DAPTF as an organization and to amphibian research and conservation has helped make the DAPTF the influential organization that it is. We have been fortunate to have his time, advice, and insights over all of these years.

Jeanne McKay is the DAPTF's International Coordinator and *Froglog* Editor; she was preceded by John Baker and John Wilkinson. Their hard work and constant involvement made all of the things happen that were needed to make DAPTF run well.

On behalf of the DAPTF, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank our Regional and Thematic Working Group Chairs for their dedication in collecting data on amphibian declines and their causes around the world.

A special thanks to the following individuals, institutions and organizations whose sustained contributions over the years helped to make up the DAPTF's core funds: David & Marvalee Wake, George B. Rabb, James Hanken, Margaret M. Stewart, Mark Klein and Mary Wagner, Ronald & Miriam Heyer, Moira Hope, Arizona Zoological Society, Columbus Zoological Park Association, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Inc., International Amphibian Day, Pacific Rivers Council, Inc., Thomas and Sue Pick Family Fund, Zoological Society of Philadelphia, Peace Frogs, Arizona Game & Fish Department - Herpetology Program, Association of Reptilian and Amphibian Veterinarians, Audubon Commission, California Academy of Sciences, Captive Born Reptiles, Center for North American Herpetology, Central Illinois Herpetological Society, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Chicago Herpetological Society, Desert Fishes Council, John Ball Zoological Society, Jumping Frog Research Institute, Melbourne Zoo, Minnesota Herpetological Society, North Carolina Herpetological Society, Oklahoma Zoological Park Association, Quebec Ministry of Natural resources, RANA, Rosamund Gifford Zoo, Sainte Lawrence Valley Natural History Society, Tuscon Herpetological Society, US EPA and the Wyoming Natural Diversity Database. The USGS/ARMI group and Conservation International were also major partners in funding the research of the DAPTF's investigators.

Finally, thanks to all of you who have supported the DAPTF as an organization, and most importantly its mission through your efforts to understand the causes of amphibian declines and your actions to conserve our dwindling heritage.