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CONTACT John Cangany  
PHONE (202) 232-7933  
EMAIL [jcangany@islandpress.org](mailto:jcangany@islandpress.org)

### QUESTION AND ANSWER

# State of the Wild 2008-2009: A Global Portrait of Wildlife, Wildlands, and Oceans

With Kent H. Redford, series editor

**Q** The first Earth Day, in 1970, was used as a way to push environmental issues into the spotlight around the world during a time when the term “environment” carried little weight with people. Since then, Earth Day has evolved into a day for us to remember why environmental issues are important, who is affected by them, and how to recommit ourselves to fight climate change, biodiversity loss, and the dependence of non-renewable energy. How has The Wildlife Conservation Society evolved since the first Earth Day to keep important conservation issues in the public’s eye?

**A** The Wildlife Conservation Society has evolved in many ways to strengthen biodiversity conservation and increase public understanding of issues facing the conservation of wildlife and wild lands. Our global conservation programs started as a small group of determined scientists doing field surveys of threatened animals like the mountain gorilla and orangutan. Now, thirty eight years later, the global program works to save species, landscapes, and seascapes, and works with local communities, in over sixty countries. In that time, we’ve gathered and shared information about species’ needs - most recently for Asian elephants, whale sharks, and guanaco - and trained hundreds of wildlife scientists. WCS has helped establish parks and wildlife corridors critical for the survival of species such as chimpanzees in Gabon, jaguars in Central America, and grizzly bears and caribou in Canada.

One project that summarizes what has happened to the Earth over the past 38 years, and how WCS is working to communicate the need for conservation, is the “Human Footprint.” By gathering information from scientists, satellite imagery, census data, and computer mapping technology, WCS and Columbia University scientists added together the main impacts that humans have had for every square kilometer on Earth. This new perspective of our planet shows the most heavily-trammeled areas and the most wild areas and reveals that 83 percent of the Earth’s surface is directly affected by people, and 90 percent of the seas are influenced by us. With the prospect of

future growth and climate change, these maps help WCS and other conservation organizations focus and communicate conservation efforts.

WCS also runs the four New York City Zoos and Aquarium. With 4 million visitors a year, these institutions have been one of our main avenues to communicate the richness and value of species in our world. Recent award-winning exhibits such as Congo and Tiger Mountain have inspired people to care about Central African rainforests, and to see our connections to other species. The zoos have also become more Earth-friendly: we have worked with other groups to clean up the Bronx River and refurbished two older exhibits to make them highly energy and water efficient), and are implementing energy-saving plans to reduce our carbon emissions.

**Q. Will there be Earth Day events at any of the WCS urban wildlife parks? If so, where can people learn more about them?**

**A** Bronx Zoo [www.bronxzoo.com](http://www.bronxzoo.com)

Human Footprint Exhibit: Learn facts on the average American's consumption throughout their lifetime.

Conservation Cotton Initiative: The Wildlife Conservation Society has joined forces with EDUN, a socially conscious clothing company owned by Ali Lawson and U2's Bono, to launch the Conservation Cotton Initiative (CCI). The Initiative works towards improving the livelihoods of African Farmers and protecting wildlife habitats through products grown and sewn in Africa.

Recycled Animal Kingdom: A one-of-a-kind animal sculpture - all created from found objects.

Storytelling, Keeper Talks, and Animal Enrichment sessions.

NY Aquarium [www.nyaquarium.com](http://www.nyaquarium.com)

Seas the Day: Join us to honor our Oceans included with Green Fest - a celebration of all things "green" with Local vendors and organizations.

Central Park Zoo [www.centralparkzoo.com](http://www.centralparkzoo.com)

The "Bear" Facts - Learn about polar bears and their plight.

For Kids: The Captain Cocoa Show - Join Captain Cocoa and fly to South America to save tamarin monkeys.

Prospect Park Zoo [www.prospectparkzoo.com](http://www.prospectparkzoo.com)

Environmental Film Screening: National Geographic Special "Eden at the End of the World"

**Q What are some of the issues the WCS sees as the most pressing to work on in 2008?**

**A** WCS will concentrate on a variety of strategies in the coming years to effectively save wildlife and wild places. One is to concentrate our efforts in larger landscapes that are not yet destroyed. In these areas, our pooled expertise, training and partnerships have the best chance of informing conservation policy. One such place is Mongolia, where saiga antelope and other rare species are being over hunted for furs and use of their parts in traditional Chinese medicine. A second pressing issue

for WCS is to understand how climate change affects species, led by a study on coral and sea currents in the Indian Ocean. A third, though not final, area of pressing area of work is saving amphibians. Close to 2/3 of all amphibian species are now threatened due to chytrid fungus disease and habitat loss. 2008 is the ‘The Year of the Frog’ and zoos and conservation organizations will prioritize these tiny, wonderfully diverse, and ecologically important creatures. WCS has captive breeding programs for at least four species of amphibians, among them the Kihansi Spray toad and the Panamanian golden frog.

**Q One of the concepts proposed in the newest edition of *State of the Wild* is that humans are now charged with managing wildlife and wild places because of human caused change. When was this concept first realized at WCS, and how have other groups around the world responded to it?**

**A** People have to manage threats to wildlife: we now dominate most of the ecological processes on the globe, as evidenced by the Human Footprint map, emerging zoonotic diseases, and climate change. WCS continues to work in landscapes with resident human communities to work out solutions to protect wildlife. We also have to understand wildlife behavior: Because many natural interactions between species have been disturbed, wildlife scientists have to study wildlife population to learn how to best manage them. A recent study of interactions between wolves and coyotes showed that their comparative impact on pronghorn antelope was different than what had previously been believed. Finally, people have to physically help species to survive. The city Zoos and the Association of Zoos and Aquaria along with the IUCN-World Conservation Union have set up a complex set of Species Survival Programs. These programs document where endangered species are in captivity and match up genetically suitable pairs for breeding. The eventual goal is increasing the number and genetic viability of rare and threatened species for eventual reintroduction into the wild. WCS has worked on SSPs for 43 species of mammals, including snow leopards and golden lion tamarins, and for 11 birds and 4 reptiles.

**Q How does the “One World - One Health” concept apply to our understanding of current environmental problems?**

**A** Humans continue to push into wild places for agriculture or resource extraction, which brings livestock, people, and wild animals in ever closer contact. The disturbance of wild ecosystems disrupts populations of predators and prey and stresses wild populations. This, combined with more intense livestock and poultry husbandry and increased bushmeat and wildlife trade, and increased global travel, means that a disease that erupts in one part of the world can easily become a problem for other parts of the world: one world - one health. Everything is connected. For example, Ebola virus has ravaged the gorilla population in Congo, and killed many people as well. We saw the connection between wildlife disturbance and livestock and human disease outbreaks in 2003-2004 SARS and Nipah virus. And most recently, we have learned that Avian Influenza (H5N1) was brewing in poultry markets in Asia and has moved across the world with migratory geese and ducks, which seem unaffected by it. ‘One world-one health’ means that to protect wildlife, we have to understand why they get diseases that decimate populations (such as white-nosed bat syndrome in the US). To protect people, we have to understand how people and

livestock create conditions for diseases to erupt. The connection to people is critical - of 1,407 known human pathogens, 58% are zoonotic, which means they can spread from wildlife to humans and back under the right conditions.

**Q     What will you be doing for Earth Day?**

**A**I'll be in the Ruaha landscape in central Tanzania helping our Africa Program assess its top twelve conservation sites and working with them on strategically planning for their continued success over the next decade. I will take a moment to gaze across the Ruaha River with its snorting hippos and elegant water fowl and imagine a future in which people and wildlife can coexist in harmony.