Joining Forces to Improve Our World

WILLIAM B. KARESH,* STEVEN A. OSOFSKY,+ TONIE E. ROCKE,‡
AND PAUL L. BARROWS§

*Wildlife Health Sciences, Wildlife Conservation Society, Bronx, NY 10460, U.S.A., email wkaresh@wcs.org
+World Wildlife Fund, 1250 Twenty-Fourth Street NW, Washington, DC 20037–1132, U.S.A.
‡National Wildlife Health Center, 6006 Schroeder Road, Madison, WI 53711, U.S.A.
§Wildlife Disease Association, 56 Crazy Cross Road, Wimberley, TX 78676, U.S.A.

Introduction

Few would doubt that the chances of success of modern conservation efforts are enhanced significantly by multidisciplinary approaches to solving social, economic, political, and biological challenges. Unfortunately, the reluctance to collaborate, either among various groups of professional colleagues with ostensibly similar conservation goals or among stakeholders having opposing points of view, is strongly grounded in human emotions and fiercely guarded by our ability to rationalize our choices. As in many animal societies, discrete groups band together to defend resources or expand control of territory. Outsiders are excluded from access to resources and positions of influence. In the field of conservation, we have heard groups of scientists or managers claim that others have little to contribute or even express fears that other disciplines may "uncover" information that could be detrimental to the cause, as if a lack of scientific information has ever saved a species from extinction. Fortunately, we also have the intellectual ability to overcome some of our human tendencies, to learn from colleagues with disparate experiences and points of view, and to join together to effect change toward common goals. The latter approach has been encouraged and applauded by the editor and authors in recent issues of *Conservation Biology*.

Another recent example highlights not only the potential effectiveness of collaboration but also the growing acceptance of additional disciplines into conservation discussions two decades after the mass immigrations of academic biologists and physical anthropologists of the late 1970s and 1980s. As noted in this journal over the last decade, the biomedical community (human- and animal-oriented) is working more closely with other disciplinary groups to achieve conservation goals. Disease specialists are now being welcomed to discuss the long-standing concepts of healthy ecosystems and healthy populations.

Collaboration among Health Disciplines

Among disease specialists are groups working together rather than against one another. In July of 2001, the Society for Tropical Veterinary Medicine, a 12-year-old organization of professionals concerned primarily with livestock diseases of the tropics and the production of healthier livestock, and the Wildlife Disease Association (WDA), a 50-year-old organization of scientists concerned primarily with the study and management of diseases of wildlife populations, met jointly for the first time.

Specialists advocating the importance of their areas of interest, competition for resources, competition for research and project funding, and a general lack of disciplinary interaction conceivably could have lead to a reluctance to collaborate or a dismissal of each other's concerns and goals. In fact, the opposite occurred when the two groups held their joint scientific meeting, "Wildlife and Livestock Disease and Sustainability: What Makes Sense?"

Prior to the meeting, a committee of members from the WDA worked on a proposed resolution pointing out the interrelatedness of wildlife and livestock health and highlighting an array of factors that can affect the success of development and conservation efforts, the sustainability of such programs, and thus the chances of real improvements in human livelihoods. At the joint meeting, the members of the Society for Tropical Veterinary Medicine reviewed the "Pilanesberg Resolution" and joined with the WDA in approving it as an official

Paper submitted September 8, 2001; revised manuscript accepted December 19, 2001.

Conservation Biology, Pages 1432-1434
Volume 16, No. 5, October 2002

statement and product of the meeting. A press release was prepared, the document was forwarded to the wire services, and copies were scheduled to be sent to the heads of bilateral and multilateral aid organizations around the world. Two groups of scientists with different professional aims and agendas could not have stated their commitment to collaboration more openly.

Pilanesberg Resolution

The following resolution calling for recognition by the international donor community of animal health sciences as critical to the design and management of sustainable wildlife and/or livestock-based programs was unanimously approved by the Wildlife Disease Association and the Society for Tropical Veterinary Medicine:

- *Whereas, contact and resource competition between wildlife and livestock continuously expand as more and more land comes under some form of human use;*
- *whereas, wild and domestic animals have many diseases in common and both groups can and do play different roles in disease epidemiology, and recognizing that these interrelationships can have significant implications for disease prevention or control schemes;*
- *whereas, livestock-based and wildlife-based activities are undertaken separately as well as jointly as primary modes of sustenance, economic betterment and support of rural livelihoods, with the sustainability thereof inextricably linked to ecologically appropriate land-use choices;*
- *whereas, the sustainable management of livestock as well as the conservation of wildlife require ground-level stewardship, including disease surveillance, by those communities closest to and most dependent on these resources;*
- *whereas, numerous governmental and nongovernmental organizations worldwide provide financial resources, incentives, leadership, and advice targeted at boosting productivity and sustainability of the livestock and/or natural resource management sectors without always recognizing concomitant disease implications, which can be significant and complex;*
- *whereas, limited funding streams for wildlife and/or livestock initiatives require prudent use;*
- *whereas, donor organizations seldom possess sufficient internal expertise regarding the myriad disease issues implicit in ensuring the success of wildlife and/or livestock-based programs; and*
- *whereas, the Wildlife Disease Association and the Society for Tropical Veterinary Medicine, along with other local, national, and international organizations, represent professionals who possess unique skills, knowledge, and experience with wild and domestic animal diseases and their underlying causes, ecological relationships, and economic implications.*

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Wildlife Disease Association and the Society for Tropical Veterinary Medicine urge those organizations contemplating the funding and implementation of programs involving wildlife or livestock resources to:

- *encourage projects that foster integrative approaches to livestock production, food security, human health, economic growth, democracy and governance, biodiversity conservation, and natural resource management in order to build upon synergies among these sectors while precluding conflicting policies and/or negative impacts on either livestock or wildlife health;*
- *formalize steps in their project design, environmental impact assessment, and implementation processes which address wildlife, livestock, and rangeland health issues and their implications for sustainability and thus success, recognizing that these projects may alter fundamental relationships between animal hosts and potential pathogens and parasites;*
- *when contemplating projects involving domestic and/or wild animals, establish relationships with appropriate wildlife and domestic animal health-oriented organizations and recognized local, national, regional, and international experts, thereby identifying an appropriate pool of professionals who can assist in ensuring the inclusion of timely, science-based advice in planning, implementation, and monitoring processes; and*
- *put a premium on local human capacity building to address the long-term technical needs of development activities that require expertise in domestic animal health and wildlife health by building adequate support into project design and implementation so as to engage local expertise and to foster capacity building at professional as well as community levels as a first-tier priority within and beyond the life-spans of such programs.*

Effects of the Resolution

Was the resolution worth the effort? A few years may pass before we know whether any aid organizations change their strategies as a result of the Pilanesberg Resolution. The benefits could be that a few bilateral development agencies or the World Bank will take notice of the resolution and add its concepts to their standard operating procedures. The International Monetary Fund has officially acknowledged receipt of the resolution and

stated its intention to distribute it to relevant internal departments. But even if effects of the resolution are limited, two professional groups representing over 1000 scientists resolved to join together to address some of the primary governmental and nongovernmental organizations whose decisions will largely influence the future of agricultural practices and the fate of wildlife—the foci of these scientists' professional passions. The two groups resolved that each had expertise to contribute to solving the modern challenges of conservation and human livelihoods. They resolved to work together and to value information from strangers outside their fields. Hundreds of graduate students watched their advisors and mentors reach out and begin partnerships. The scientists improved their public image and credibility, and the wire-service headline read, "Animal Disease Experts Join Forces in Interest of Humanity."

We as conservation biologists have the opportunity to identify more interdisciplinary barriers needing removal and to construct bridges to connect castles of disciplinary knowledge. We can open the gates and make this another decade in which the ranks of people actively participating in conservation biology swell dramatically. Rather than *studying* examples of synergism, we will have the opportunity to *become* examples of synergism. We can use this strategy to improve the odds of making conservation work. The choice of how we work and how we will be viewed is ours.