

TESTIMONY  
OF  
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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK  
before the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
Hearing on  
H.R. 50  
Multinational Species Conservation Funds Reauthorization Act of 2000  
and  
H.R. 465  
Asian Elephant Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2007  
March 13, 2007

**Introduction**

Thank you Chairwoman Bordallo, for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Subcommittee today.

My name is John Berry and I am the Director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo. The National Zoo, in Washington, D.C., draws nearly 3 million visitors per year, and has approximately 38,000 member families of Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ). The zoo's website, supported by FONZ, receives more than 20 million visits annually from around the world. The Smithsonian Institution's museums and zoo teach millions of people each year in living classrooms, dedicate millions annually to education, conservation and scientific research programs and support over 130 conservation and research projects in more than 35 countries.

The Smithsonian Institution's professionals work collaboratively with other Federal/state agencies to help shape national and international wildlife conservation policy by providing expert comment and input on such issues as migratory species, biological diversity, wildlife trade, endangered species, and species conservation. National Zoo staff also contributes their expertise to discussions on animal care and welfare, emerging diseases and conservation education. In addition, the National Zoo is a member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and supports the work of Species Survival Plan (SSP) program. I would like to take my time today to provide examples of how the National Zoo contributes to that work and other conservation work that is complementary to the important programs addressed in the legislation being considered by the Subcommittee.

## Tigers

The Smithsonian Institution and the National Zoo have been involved in the study and conservation of tigers in Asia since the inception of the Smithsonian-Nepal Tiger Ecology Project in 1973 (later the Smithsonian-Nepal Terai Ecology Project). Currently, the National Zoo's primary involvement in tiger conservation in Asia is through senior scientist John Seidensticker's leadership of the Save the Tiger Fund Council, a partnership between the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the ExxonMobil corporation. For the last ten years, Dr. Seidensticker has guided the investment of about \$1 million a year in conservation projects across Asia, and in doing so has helped to create synergistic efforts among a variety of conservation organizations working to save tigers in Asia. The Save the Tiger Fund (STF) supports projects conducted by the Wildlife Conservation Society, the World Wildlife Fund, the Zoological Society of London, among many other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

A recent Save the Tiger Fund evaluation of their investments in tiger conservation over the past ten years found the following:

Over the course of the decade, Save The Tiger Fund helped conservationists to change the conservation paradigm from one that focused exclusively on protected areas to a larger, landscape-level approach that weaves together protected core areas with human-tiger friendly habitats like multiple-use forest buffer zones connected to each other by habitat corridors. The two most successful examples of this work also received the bulk of Save The Tiger Fund's investments: the Russian Far East (21%) and the Terai Arc Landscape of Nepal and India (11%). A landscape-level vision has been developed in both these places that has buy-in from many different NGOs and their respective governments. These collaborative, problem-solving strategies involved many different organizations that successfully worked together to stabilize tiger populations.

Given that Save The Tiger Fund provided about one third of the funding to tiger conservation efforts since 1995, the evaluators believe that Save The Tiger Fund can take some credit for larger landscape-level success stories such as those of the Russian Far East and the Terai Arc landscape. Without this conservation financing mechanism and the conservation partnerships that it fostered, tigers would be much worse off today.

To guide investments in tiger conservation over the next decade, Dr. Seidensticker, Zoo scientists Peter Leimgruber and Melissa Songer, and their colleagues from World Wildlife Fund, Wildlife Conservation Society, and the Save the Tiger Fund, published in 2006 the most comprehensive analysis ever of the current status of tiger habitats in Asia. This landmark report documents a massive decline in the areas occupied by tigers but also found that half of the remaining 76 landscapes can still support 100 tigers or more, and four strongholds could support more than 500 tigers, providing excellent opportunities for recovery of wild tiger populations. This information is essential to determining priority sites for conservation action.

## **Elephants**

The National Zoo's Asian Elephants are a major symbol for Smithsonian science and conservation work at home and abroad. At home, National Zoo vets and husbandry staff provide excellent daily and clinical care for elephants, including recent care of geriatric elephants. Drs. Suzan Murray and Carlos Sanchez have performed clinical research on the pharmacokinetics of antibiotics in elephants. Dr. Janine Brown has pioneered reproductive assessments of female elephants including artificial insemination of female elephants and investigation into treatment protocols for hormone-responsive uterine pathology.

In range countries, Drs. Sharon Deem and Peter Leimgruber have assisted with training elephant professionals in Burma. This captive elephant work is important in helping us to understand and manage wild Asian elephant populations, from which working elephants are drawn. Our field veterinarian Dr. Sharon Deem has provided snare removal and clinical care for wild injured African elephants in Gabon, and has assisted wildlife biologists with tranquilization of these wild animals and placement of radio-collars on elephants in Gabon, including the incredibly rare forest elephants. In addition, the Smithsonian Institution is also a trustee of Mpala Research Center in Kenya, which is located within one of the highest density areas for African elephants, and which hosts a great deal of research on the biology and management of these elephants.

Dr. Leimgruber and other Smithsonian scientists also have projects that provide essential information on the basic ecology of Asian forest and savanna elephants. Wild elephant densities in Asia appear to be much lower than expected, demonstrating that the population may be declining rapidly. In one project, Dr. Leimgruber and his colleagues study the fencing of elephant populations in nature reserves – this has frequently been attempted to reduce people-elephant conflict and protect elephants. However, in most cases fencing appears to be ineffective and extremely expensive. This project is designed to analyze the effects fencing has on elephant movement and behavior. Elephants were collared before the fencing of the reserve occurred and we are currently trying to determine the effects of the fencing from the satellite-tracking data. Another project studies the translocation of crop raiding elephants as a major technique in the reduction of people-elephant conflicts. Smithsonian projects will provide essential information for the conservation and management of remaining wild elephant populations in Asia.

The National Zoo has also helped train some of Asia's most important conservation leaders, people who have dedicated their careers to tiger, elephant, and rhino conservation. These professionals include AJT Johnsingh who recently retired from the Wildlife Institute of India, Ullas Karanth of Wildlife Conservation Society, and Eric Wickramanayake of World Wildlife Fund.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, I would like to say that the National Zoo fully supports the programs addressed in these bills. We have seen the great success of these programs in the field, and appreciate fully the urgent need to continue these efforts. Without continued support and vigilance, including the activities made possible by these Acts, there is a chance that these magnificent species may become extinct within a generation.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on these important wildlife conservation measures. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.