

BiodiverCities 2010

Preliminary Report to the IUCN/WCPA Cities and Protected Areas Specialist Group

From September 6-8, the Urban Protected Areas Network held its inaugural international conference: BiodiverCities 2010.

Financed in large part by PIRVE (the French Interdisciplinary Research Program on Cities and Environment), with additional support from other partners, the event was co-organized by IUCN/WCPA Cities and Protected Area Specialist Group members Louise Bruno (Institut Libertas) and Glen Hyman (Sciences Po – Paris).

Around 60 persons attended the event, from some 20 countries (despite an inconveniently timed French transportation strike – which unfortunately kept several partners from coming). Participants included many researchers, representatives from diverse city governments, several urban protected area managers, staff from a number of international and intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organizations.

The Final Conference Program and all PowerPoint presentations are available from the Conference website: (www.BiodiverCities.net/Presentations). A final participant list will shortly also be made available, and a formal conference proceedings will follow. In the meantime, herewith a preliminary (and cursory) report of the event:

September 6

The first day, BiodiverCities convened four round tables – one for each of the pilot sites in the Urban Protected Areas Network: Table Mountain National Park (Cape Town), Tijuca National Park (Rio de Janeiro), Sanjay Gandhi National Park (Mumbai), and Nairobi National Park.

Senior staff from these marquee Urban National Parks presented their perspectives on the specific opportunities and challenges of managing these protected areas (PAs) within an urban context, while representatives of each respective city shared their own ideas on these same questions.

Each of these coupled presentations were followed by lively Q & A sessions – in which a number of subjects seemed to recur, chief among them – the diverse mechanisms by which revenue (and other benefits) which accrue to the park are shared – both among other parks in National PA systems, and also with the City itself.

While in some of these cases (i.e., Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro), there had already been regular contact between park and city managers, for other sites (in particular Nairobi), the BiodiverCities event surprisingly provided a first opportunity for these interdependent actors to work together.

While it is difficult to summarize the wide and deep exchanges that took place, several key points merit mentioning here:

- 1) Protected Areas in Cities represent a clear “Urban Exception.” Such PAs require different strategies and approaches than those customarily used in wilderness settings.

- 2) As most people now live in cities, it's in cities that the political and public case must be made for nature conservation, writ large. Urban Protected Areas serve as ambassadors for conservation in more remote places – and for this reason, they have a special role to play in building political support for national PA programs.
- 3) The “Park <-> City” relationship is a gross over-simplification of what is a multi-stakeholder web of interdependence.
- 4) Especially in urban settings, multiple constituencies view and use parks for different and sometimes competing purposes (i.e., recreation, conservation, heritage, religious, residential, viewscape, etc.). Reconciling these perspectives into coherent management of shared space is a difficult – but essential - task of park managers.
- 5) Accordingly, tradeoffs and creative strategies are necessary in the management of UPAs – which cannot be managed in a purely technical manner. Managing urban protected areas is inherently (and perhaps even mostly) a political exercise.

September 7

The second day, BiodiverCities convened four thematic workshops, at which 16 papers were presented by a range of researchers and practitioners. The workshop themes were:

1. *Biodiversity without Borders:
Conserving Urban Nature within—and beyond—Protected Areas*
2. *Whose Areas? - Conflicts and Dialogues in and around Urban Protected Areas*
3. *What governance for cities and protected areas?*
4. *Protecting Areas? What future for this strategy in urban settings*

Given the range of topics covered, it will be impossible here to make a meaningful synthesis. Instead, as a complement to the PowerPoint presentations linked to the Web page mentioned above, I would invite anyone interested to download the individual paper summaries (some in French, some in English) from the conference website (www.BiodiverCities.net/Papers).

September 8

The final day of BiodiverCities was devoted to a field visit to the Fontainebleau Forest on the outskirts of Paris. This excursion was jointly hosted by the *Office National des Forêts* and the UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve of Fontainebleau and Gâtinais. A morning plenary provided the opportunity to discuss the specific challenges of managing an urban forest that receives a surprisingly large number of visits (approximately 17 million!) each year. The group then visited a sensitive natural area which had been locally purchased with the proceeds of a special building tax (5% of new construction costs). Following a lunch - in the very building where IUCN was founded participants visited the *Gorges de Franchard*, one of the most frequently visited sites in the Fontainebleau region.

Glen Hyman