

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION PRIORITISES CAVES AND KARST

– Jay Anderson

The IUCN (the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, also referred to as the World Conservation Union) has a number of specialist commissions. The Commissions include: Education and Communication; Environmental, Economic and Social Policy; Environmental Law; Ecosystem Management; Species Survival and Protected Areas. The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) has a number of Regions, where IUCN members develop action plans and provide support for those involved with environmental management in particular areas. The WCPA also has a number of special Taskforces, which provide a very important mechanism to promote in-depth or specialized work within WCPA.



Jay Anderson (left) and Dr John Watson (right), respectively the inaugural and newly appointed chairs of the Taskforce – ACKMA Conference 2009.

The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Caves and Karst Taskforce was established in 1992 primarily to establish an informal network of people with interests in the specific issues of protecting cave and karst environments. It is known that karst landscapes are extremely important places for human, economic and scientific reasons, but they are also extremely vulnerable and sensitive environments. It is very important that governments, land managers and others who visit karst areas understand the dynamic processes of the karst environment and the best practice principles for managing these environments.

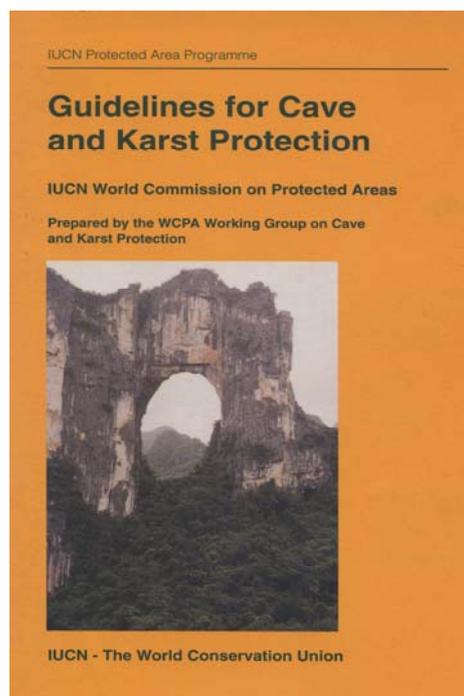
The Taskforce was originally established by John Watson at the 1992 World Parks Congress in Venezuela. It was then referred to as the 'Network on Cave Protection and Management' and structured within the IUCN Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA). At the time, John was a member of the recently formed CNPPA Mountain Theme Working Group and saw the need for a similar group to focus on caves and karst. John remembers that about 30 of the ~1500 congress delegates turned up to a brief meeting in response to a few notices posted around the venue...and the group began!

The CNPPA later changed its name to the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA – around 1996) and the Network became known as the IUCN Working Group on Cave and Karst Protection (now referred to as the Caves and Karst Task Force). John was chair until 1997, when he handed the leadership to Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith, who has only recently stepped down as chairman of the Task Force.

There have been many benefits relating to the existence of an International Network. The Taskforce has provided a central communication point for interested members around the world (especially those in Third World Countries who were frequently on their own without the presence of national organisations like ACKMA to help). The Taskforce prepared and published the guidelines for the management of caves and karst (IUCN Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection (Watson et al Eds, 1997). This involved important input from hundreds of land managers, researchers, speleologists and others from many countries around the world. The primary aim of the guidelines is to raise awareness of the special needs of caves and karst within IUCN itself and also within protected area agencies around the world.

If ACKMA members are interested in more information please do not hesitate to contact me. I will endeavour to provide regular up-dates on the Taskforce in future issues of the ACKMA journal.

* Chair – IUCN Caves and Karst Taskforce



Watson, John, Hamilton-Smith, Elery, Gillieson, David, and Kiernan, Kevin (Eds.), 1997. Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection, IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK. 63pp.