

More money for more conversations about conservation

Having recently been sent some press statements concerning the out of control trade in great apes , I decide to look up the link below on how the issue was raised at last week's GRASP council meeting at UNESCO in Paris.

<http://www.iisd.ca/grasp/council2/Nov8.html>

Scanning over the images and names in the various picture galleries I concluded that I am familiar with most of these players. Many have been in the great ape business for decades. My guess is that cumulatively they have spent tens of millions of dollars attending such venues and held thousands of such conversations about conservation.

Some of the relevant summary statements at the opening of this get together make it clear that they accept that things today are worse for the apes than they have been at any time in the recent past. However the players attending this GRASP meeting and generally flying from meeting to meeting are also the ones who have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on conservation projects supposedly doing something about the plight of the apes. Now they are telling us we are worse off than before. The sanctuaries are full (some of those attending still advocating euthanasia for the orphans supposedly because they are lost to the wild genetic pool, not accepting the fact that each new orphan is a failure of their conservation efforts). The bush meat trade is far from under control, the forests in Indonesia and with it the habitat of the orangutans are coming down faster than ever before, more live ape orphans have been traded in the last decade than at any time since CITES came into the picture. What does this say about the effectiveness of these silverbacks attending these meetings and campaigning to get even more funding with absolutely no indication that they have learnt anything from past failure or have any real plans to test any new approaches (maybe jettison some of the political correctness and not go the the way of least resistance for a change).

The fact is in the corporate world most of these players, based on their track record on the table, would have been led out to pasture a long time ago. Only in the conservation industry do they get away with 30 years of declaring to be on top of things and patting each other on the shoulder while indeed the track record on the ground is that all major battles and certainly the war is being lost on a very wide front.

Once they have a bunch of corporate executives sitting on the moderating podium demanding independent third party audits of projects (a more businesslike approach to conservation as suggested in an earlier opinion piece) with the results being put in the public domain and lessons being learnt from past failure, I will pull out my cheque book and write a big one (by my standards) for whoever will carry the ball on this front. In the meantime my assessment is that these are many more feel good conversations about conservation, talking about and financing a band aid project here and there while the patient is dying of terminal cancer.

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