

Contribution to discussion theme 2 and 5, 28 January

By Genevieve Patenaude

Despite my late participation into the workshop, I would like to contribute to theme 2-values (my contribution also has relevance to theme 5). During the past years, I have been working with an indigenous community (Embera) in Panama. The purpose of the research was to compare local fauna priorities to the ones expressed through the IUCN red lists and the CITES.

Internationally, the best known species based biodiversity prioritisation system is the one of the IUCN. Priorities are set on the basis of a small number of criteria such as rarity, threats, species representativeness and function. All are nevertheless related to abundance. Most species-based conservation efforts, even at the community level, focus on species appearing in these lists. But the question raised by Herbert Tushabe appears crucial: What if priorities at the international and local level differ?

The case of the gorilla is only one of many examples where priorities and worldviews seem incompatible. It can be paralleled to a perception that the Embera have of the giant anteater, a very rare mammal which can apparently still be found in the province of Darien. The giant anteater is perceived by the Embera as a threat to their hunting dogs (which they value strongly). If, whilst accompanied by hunting dogs, the Embera see an anteater, there will be no hesitation: the animal will be shot dead. Priorities here are obviously different to the ones expressed by the IUCN!

These examples raise the issues of priorities (and underlying values). Since conservation has to be oriented towards priorities then choices are to be made: based on what values, worldviews, etc., will these priorities be defined? It is clear that communities have a leading role to play, as acknowledged under the CBD. However, as previously mentioned by participants of the workshop, local people are unlikely to want to monitor [or protect?] biodiversity in which they have no direct interests.

What if local interests (here priorities) were considered in a parallel manner to the ones perceived as the interests of the "outsiders"? Would it not be possible, for a start, to include in the red list (which has international impacts for conservation) new indices of priorities based on "local or cultural importance"? Besides criteria of endemism, rarity, distribution, etc., criteria of local importance could appear. Even though this implies necessary trade-offs, if local interests and priorities were well acknowledged, and if local communities were well aware that they are, I strongly believe that it would help facilitating synergy and their acceptance of the outsiders' perspectives. This will, of course, require humility from scientists as well as increasing collaboration with anthropologists and social scientists.

Best regards to you all,

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