

Afrotheria Specialist Group revamps its newsletter

The IUCN/SSC Afrotheria Specialist Group published six editions of *Afrotherian Conservation* between 2002 and 2008. In July-August 2009 the newsletter's editor, PJ Stephenson, conducted a review to determine how readers and group members felt the publication could be improved. Feedback from 40 respondents showed general approval of the aim, format, content and frequency of the newsletter, with a clear preference for sections that profile target species and list the latest publications. Proposed improvements included more review articles, progress reports on conservation and research projects, more French articles, and more illustrations and photos. Members also want to receive information on funding and job opportunities.

The full report on the newsletter review, as well as all previous editions of *Afrotherian Conservation*, can be found on our group's website at:

<http://afrotheria.net/newsletter.html>

We have done our best to start addressing some of these recommendations in this edition. Meanwhile, please contact me directly if you have any further feedback or ideas for improving our newsletter.

PJ Stephenson

Editor, *Afrotheria Conservation*

IUCN/SSC Afrotheria Specialist Group

c/o WWF International, Gland, Switzerland

PJStephenson@wwfint.org

The Afrotheria Specialist Group gets a new web address

When we formed our specialist group our web master at the time, Erik Seiffert, worked closely with the then California Academy of Sciences web master Charles Fox to develop our web site. It has served us very well over the years, thanks to both of their efforts. Things change, however, and the Academy is implementing some significant changes to the way they manage material on their web site, which necessitated some long-range planning on our part, in terms of our web site. The academy and I have decided to move our web material to our own address or URL, where Charles Fox will continue to help us keep it current.

The new URL is <http://www.afrotheria.net/>

In addition to the usual updates and fine-tuning of the material at our new address, we have added a new menu option: "Donations, Please". With our own web address, we now have yearly recurrent expenses for the URL and server, and their maintenance. I hope all readers will be able to donate a modest amount towards the site maintenance. Many thanks in advance for your support!

Some years ago Erik Seiffert became focused on his professional career and job security and was unable to actively participate as web master. With the help of Charles Fox at AvianDesign, I have limped along since then. Our web site would greatly benefit from a web-

savvy specialist group member taking on the web weaving! Please let me know if you are warm and willing!

Galen Rathbun

Chair, IUCN-SSC Specialist Group

Noticeboard

Photographic map for hyraxes (Procavidae)

In order to gain insight into the diversity of the phenotypic characteristics and loud calls of hyraxes (Procavidae) throughout their geographic ranges, we designed a map ('Hyrax Photomap') that is linked to photographs and to sources to contact for recordings of loud calls. Hyrax Photomap serves as a 'living' photographic and audio collection --- a tool we earlier designed for the primates and warthogs of East Africa (www.wildsolutions.nl). Anyone with an interest in hyraxes can use this resource, add their hyrax photographs, announce that they have audio recordings that are available for use by others, and provide observations, comments, references, and other information.

The expectation is that Hyrax Photomap will become increasingly useful as the number of photographs, audio recording, and information base grows. To access Hyrax Photomap, go to <http://picasa.web.google.com/lh/view?uname=wildsolutions&cuname=wildsolutions&tags=Hyrax#> or www.wildsolutions.nl. Clicking on a particular photograph will cause it to enlarge and related information will appear (e. g. species name, location, vegetation type, altitude, vocalizations). The locality of the photograph/recording will appear on a Google map on the right side of the screen (Figure 1). An overview of all photographs/audio localities can be readily accessed by clicking on the 'View Map' link in the lower right corner (immediately under the small map). The viewer can leave a comment with any photograph or audio entry (if s/he is a member of Google) by clicking the comment button for that photograph/audio entry). Audio recordings can not be downloaded from Hyrax Photomap directly, but a request can be made, via email, to the person who holds the recording.

To make Hyrax Photomap as complete and useful as possible, we invite you to send us your photographs and/or audio recording details of hyraxes. For each photograph, please include as much detail as possible...most importantly the species name (or likely species), locality where the photograph was taken, coordinates (or describe the location so that we can plot it on the map), elevation, date, and whether you made audio recordings at the site. The more details the better...so please describe the vegetation, the call, etc.

Unfortunately, audio recordings cannot be uploaded onto Hyrax Photomap. If you have hyrax vocalizations to share, please send us the locality details (not the actual recordings) and we will add a dummy image to the map to show the viewers that there are recordings available from you for this locality. Again, add as many details as possible.



Figure 1. A screen shot from the Hyrax Photomap.

If you have any suggestions, questions or comments, please contact us. Photographs (not larger than 2 MB) can be sent by email to yvonne@wildsolutions.nl or on CD by airmail to the address below.

Yvonne A. de Jong & Thomas M. Butynski
Eastern Africa Primate Diversity and Conservation Programme, P. O. Box 149, 10400 Nanyuki, Kenya.
yvonne@wildsolutions.nl or wildsolutions@gmail.com

How is membership in the Afrotheria Specialist Group decided?

When we set up the IUCN/SSC Afrotheria Specialist Group nearly 10 years ago, several of the initial organisers discussed what criteria should be used to invite members. There were several models available, from an "open to all that have any interest" at one extreme, to only those that had "demonstrated expertise" on "our" afrotheres (usually publications), at the opposite extreme. Because we wanted our specialist group to provide expertise (see our mission statement on our web site), we decided on the latter model. Another factor was that none of us, as volunteers with other jobs, wanted to spend our time administering a huge membership, given the emphasis on *specialist* rather than *interest* for our group.

We decided to partially decentralize the leadership of our group, from the more common "all-powerful" single chair, to a group of co-ordinators for each clade (see our membership list on our web site), with the role of the chair being one of leadership - providing momentum, direction, and coordination for the group. The decentralized organization avoided the potential problem of one person not being able to fully grasp all the issues related to such a diverse group of mammals as the Afrotheria, and also to disperse the work load among several volunteers.

Another factor in choosing members was the desirability to include African nationals in our group, but

at the same time not compromise our decision to keep the group membership lean and restricted to demonstrated experts. Related to this, we have tried to avoid overloading the membership with too many people from any one region or country - this especially has been a problem with regard to South Africa, Kenya, Europe, and the US.

In a few cases, we have deviated slightly from the above membership criteria. For example, a few of our members do not have species expertise with "our" afrotheres, but they are familiar with a region and are experts on important habitats, especially those that support species that have a threatened status (see the conservation page of our web site).

Lastly, as Chair I have taken the responsibility of trying to ensure that all our members remain involved with the activities of our specialist group. If not, I have not re-appointed them at the start of each quadrennial. Of course inactivity is often due to factors that are completely understandable and beyond the control of some individuals, such as job or interest changes or particularly heavy job responsibilities that preclude donating time to our specialist group (and please remember, we all serve as volunteers).

Although we are a specialist group in the strict sense of the work, we also realize that in some respects we serve as an interest group. To try and better serve this more generalized community of people, we encourage participation in our newsletter by non-members. To further meet the needs of non-members, we maintain an email list for general announcements and information related to our newsletter and web site.

Galen B. Rathbun
Chair, IUCN/SSC Afrotheria Specialist Group

Funding opportunity for specialist groups

The Chicago Zoological Society is soliciting new pro-