

February 10, 1969

Professor Arthur D. Hasler
Department of Zoology
University of Wisconsin
Madison, Wisconsin

Dear Arthur:

I recently received a blurb from Intecol which came just at the time that I was giving some thought to rationalizing the approach to preservation of endangered species of wildlife. I would assume that among the IUBS organs Intecol would have primary responsibility in this area; if I am mistaken about this please let me know right away.

Before I come to that, I would be very grateful if you or Dr. Whitehead could give me a brief rundown (I mean, of course, simply references to published statements) about the present organization of effective international activities covering different aspects of species conservation. I realize that ~~some~~ of this must be rather fragmented, like whaling and fisheries protection, and I would be more interested in those areas where there is no such obvious zone of economic competition. I ask this because I am a little baffled about suggesting the appropriate arena for discussing the program that I set forth further on.

As I have superficially remarked in the attached column, it occurs to me that our present conservation efforts are utterly chaotic, and may in fact be addressed to an unrealistic objective, namely, the preservation of every extant species. I would suggest as an alternative that we have a world conference which attempts to outline the principles of selection (call it triage, if you like) to determine those species that should command our most energetic effort, and in fact nominate certain others where the cost effectiveness of efforts to maintain them may be quite futile. I must admit that I have a certain ironic intention in making this suggestion, which is to force the public to come to grips with the certainty that some species will disappear, and to attempt to attach some numerical estimate to the probable cost of resisting that disappearance. I am also concerned that rather superficial criteria that are involved in immediate public identification play too dominant a role in the selection of desirable conservanda.

I would assume that Intecol would be the most appropriate place for rationalizing these issues, but it is hard to pursue that idea without getting a better perspective on the structure of other activities towards these ends.

Sincerely yours,

*copy to Dr. H. Whitehead
11-1-69*

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics