

## **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)**

### **'Communicating Biodiversity'**

This summary note distills the conclusions from a white paper commissioned by the RSPB as the first of a series of perspectives on 'Communicating Biodiversity'.

The RSPB project is currently exploring different approaches and ideas that might help biodiversity specialists strengthen their communications strategies.

The paper draws on private sector expertise on strategic branding.

Future project activities will explore other approaches, including perspectives from outside the UK and outside the conservation community. This paper was co-sponsored by UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

A full version of the 11,000 word paper is available at [www.glasshousepartnership.com/branding.pdf](http://www.glasshousepartnership.com/branding.pdf)

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### **'Assuring Biodiversity' - A brand-building approach**

*by Tim Kitchin, The Glasshouse Partnership*

The full discussion-paper identifies key strategies that could be used to communicate the importance and urgency of conserving biodiversity.

The paper suggests that existing efforts to conserve biodiversity are hampered by a fragmented and confused communication. It suggests that if Biodiversity were better understood, it would be better protected. To achieve that, the paper analyses the challenges of building biodiversity into a known and valued concept which can compete effectively for people's attention, time and dedication.

The author explores the implications of applying basic marketing principles to Biodiversity, and the challenges of building a strong brand through open branding dialogue and stakeholder collaboration.

By imagining biodiversity as a 'brand', the paper seeks to identify global priorities to ensure the survival of that brand biodiversity as a meaningful and relevant concept for its stakeholders.

The full paper explores the answers to 11 questions, and sets out to determine the full brand potential of Biodiversity and the best means of achieving it.

**Question 1 asks: What human need is Biodiversity addressing?**

At first sight a rich variety of personal needs are addressed by diversity:

- The desire to learn
- Self-preservation
- Family protection
- Aesthetic enjoyment
- Personal health
- Positive self-image
- Physical nourishment and protection

But which of these is most prominent? Which are increasing? And which are decreasing? Biodiversity communicators must persuade real people that biodiversity addresses their basic needs. Only by doing so will it command consistent attention and maintain mind-share commensurate with its importance.

*In branding terms, it is noteworthy how few of these human needs are directly addressed or implied in most biodiversity communications....*

**Question 2 asks: Who are the 'end users' of Biodiversity?**

Viewing 'consumers' as markets for biodiversity, how can we best 'segment' them in terms of usage and attitude?

A variety of approaches have been tried by biodiversity communicators to identify and understand their audiences. However, they have generally focused within single nations or single homogeneous communities.

The segmentation approach is chosen by biodiversity communicators will inevitably vary according to the outcome they have in mind, and the data that is available. Any segmentation must be fit for its chosen purpose. Possible ways of thinking this through include:

- By attitude to biodiversity – for purposes of engagement
- By motivation – for membership recruitment purposes
- By exposure to biodiversity – for educational purposes
- By knowledge of biodiversity – for promotional purposes
- By impact on biodiversity – for campaigning purposes
- By dependence upon biodiversity - for conservation purposes

*What is clear, is that however we try to categorise these end-users, that categorisation will never hold good for long...*

**Question 3 asks:**

**Which issues and trends are impacting the market for Biodiversity?**

Biodiversity does not have an automatic right to exist.

By envisaging the ethosystem within which biodiversity exists, we quickly realise how difficult it is for Biodiversity to obtain distinctive mindshare.

- 'Supply'

Many factors reduce the evidence of biodiversity in our lives in effect the supply of the brand - consumerism, globalisation, intensive farming, owner-occupancy, industrialisation, individualism, packaging proliferation.

- 'Substitution'

Bizarrely, many positive educational initiatives can actually act as substitutes for biodiversity: zoos, theme parks, gardens

- 'Competitors'

Biodiversity must attract and retain attention. In doing so it competes against other conceptual brands and social memes which distract our attention - sustainability, global warming, global terrorism, famine, western status symbols, tribal customs all command our constant attention.

- 'Demand'

Just as supply of biodiversity into our lives is restricted, so other factors reducing demand – urbanisation for example, or media experiences which substitute for real experience. Once again, forces which at first seem wholly benign, such as the growth of ecotourism, can actually reduce demand rather than increase it.

*These conflicting tensions at work in the market hint at just how many organisations must be aligned to protect biodiversity...but they also hint at the opportunity – for biodiversity to catalyse, rather than compete with these forces.*

#### **Question 4 asks: What are the channels for delivering Biodiversity?**

Many, many stakeholders need to be engaging deeply in the biodiversity 'mission' in the short-term. It is an assumption of the paper that achieving greater collaboration, or at least constructive dialogue between direct stakeholders and active stakeholders is an early priority to ensure biodiversity's future survival. Stakeholders include:

- Anyone who sees biodiversity education as a critical background or context to their specific work
- Anyone who seeks to educate and inform publics around specific Biodiversity issues
- Anyone who seeks to conserve biodiversity as a whole
- Anyone who seeks to conserve biodiversity at a local level
- Anyone who seeks to educate publics on Biodiversity
- Anyone who monitors and describe biodiversity
- Anyone who creates frameworks or regulations around the human/nature interface
- Anyone who performs biodiversity-related services
- Anyone who manages biodiversity infrastructure

*What is clear is that very few of these stakeholders has a truly holistic view at present.*

*As well as being custodians of the planet, they must come to see themselves as brand custodians. Much of the emotional and practical value of biodiversity is currently squandered because of a narrow and intellectually 'exclusionary' brand image...*

#### **Question 5 asks: What is the Biodiversity 'product'?**

At the heart of every brand is a product. Something that is offered to the market. What is it that Biodiversity does that people can buy and buy into?

Biodiversity comprises:

- Genetic diversity
- Organism diversity
- and Ecosystem diversity

However this description does not help us to understand. The Biodiversity product is a many-layered thing:

Biodiversity not only produces 'things': water, food, medicines, and clothing...

But also services: cleaning the water, purifying the air, fertilising crops, replenishing nutrients and regulating the weather.

And also knowledge: building our insight into genetics, geology, pharmacology, meteorology, biology...and many other facets of human existence.

And emotion: reinforcing values of long-termism, and hope.

And ethics: encouraging respect, kindness, and reciprocity.

And engagement: vividly demonstrating our interdependency.

*It is clear from even this rapid-fire summary, that the emotional value of biodiversity is massively underplayed in most communication at present. Existing attempts to 'sell' biodiversity simply do not capitalise on its potential value-add...*

**Question 6 asks:**

**What further value could be added to Biodiversity to differentiate it from competing ideas?**

The challenge here, for all stakeholders is ask themselves 'what else' could biodiversity do that would make it more important, more memorable, and more powerful, as a way of seeing the world. Some might be very strategic. Some of these might be more tactical. For example:

- Could its various services be much more tightly defined and characterised?
- Could all the knowledge that biodiversity has provided be lodged in a single global library?
- Could our experience of biodiversity be sharpened or made less remote?
- Could individuals' loyalty to biodiversity be visualised in some way – for example by all stakeholders coming together to create by creating a biodiversity passport scheme?

However distasteful to many, saving biodiversity means thinking like a marketer.

In order to maintain the relevance of biodiversity, the services and knowledge that it brings must be enhanced. Its benefits must be made visible.

*What is clear to date, is that the benefits of biodiversity may be too nebulous to captured through traditional scientific or educational communication.*

**Question 7 asks: What is the big idea/brand story behind Biodiversity?**

Every brand has a story to tell.

The paper explores many thoughts and options, but identifies the following key themes which may act as springboards for further discussion with key biodiversity stakeholders.:

Theme #1 Health: '*The Natural Health Service*'

Theme #2 Connectedness: "*A Game of Consequences*"

Theme #3 Potential: "*Capacity for Change*"

*Whatever the story at the core of biodiversity, telling that story means confronting a stark reality: there is a basic strategic conflict at the heart of current global decision-making...*

**Question 8 asks: What is the best strategy for investing in Biodiversity?**

At present, the world is divided on strategy for biodiversity.

Two distinct strategies are in play:

- the *market-led* approach – favouring trading mechanisms which allow environmental costs and benefits to be translated into cash terms and thus incorporated into core business processes which bypass the need for state control. The market led approach has led to the creation of carbon-trading mechanisms, and vociferous debates over the use of 'carbon sinks' as a mechanism to meet national targets.
- the *target-led* approach – involving the setting of global targets, then relying upon co-operative mechanisms between national governments to develop policies, mechanisms and controls to reach them. This approach has led to notable victories, such as the creation of the IUCN redlist of endangered species and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Market-led approaches have led to loud diffuse and dissonant communications.

Target-led approach have led to soft, scientific and bureaucratic communications.

Clearly a more mutualist approach is desirable. However, in the interim, the best strategy seems to be to identify shared global brand platforms around which unified communications can be cohered.

World Biodiversity Day is one example already in existence, but there need to be many more.

*The jury is still out on which route is most likely to lead to biodiversity preservation.*

*While existing evangelists are from the target-led camp, the power lies with the market-led thinkers. The challenge is to develop a stakeholder relationship – building strategy which brings all groups into alignment and allows an open dialogue across the philosophical divide...*

**Question 9 asks: How can we take the whole world with us?**

Not easily, is the answer.

However, in seeking to build a coherent brand image, Biodiversity actually has one very real advantage over a corporate brand. Its value-chain is already empowered and most are already, almost by definition, brand believers, even if they cannot articulate what that belief means.

Any stakeholder can take the lead, and begin the cost-effective public dialogue which reframes and advances brand insight.

In the meantime, there remains a leadership vacuum among biodiversity advocates, which official communication efforts have failed to fill.

*The next steps for anyone wishing to take leadership in biodiversity communications must be to engage with peers, and assert its position as clearly as possible. It's communications aims must be explained...*

**Question 10 asks: How can biodiversity be communicated?**

Clearly a dramatic improvement in Biodiversity communication is required:

- Smarter market segmentation
- Better co-ordination and collaboration among key stakeholders.
- Clearer and more compelling messaging.
- Greater mass-media outreach
- Much greater personalisation of content
- Better use of paid-for media
- Much better use of technology

Existing communication is highly fragmented and confused. And several barriers are apparent:

## A wide variety of definitions

A review of the internet reveals a variety of interpretations and explanations of biodiversity:

*Descriptive:* e.g. 'The variety of life' [UK Biodiversity Partnership] 'The fabric of life' [www.peopleandplanet.net]

*Emotive:* e.g. 'Things that live' [World Resources Institute] or "The spectacular array of life on earth" [US Consultative Group on Biodiversity] 'Our life support system' [America Museum of Natural History]

*Motivational:* e.g. 'Not simply the variety of life-forms, but the urgent need to ensure their survival' [UK Department of the Environment]

*Technical:* e.g. '...the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species, between species and between ecosystems.' [CBD]

While none of these is contradictory to one another, they indicate the intrinsic tension between biodiversity and Biodiversity – the fact and the brand. It is clear, and heartening, though, that the brand is already starting to take on a more purposeful meaning in the minds of many key communicators.

## Different focuses

Most biodiversity communications seems to fall into one of three categories:

*Species-specific campaigns* – e.g. 'Save the albatross', 'Save the whale', 'Save the...'

*Consciousness raising:* e.g. Recent communication around 'The 6<sup>th</sup> Great Extinction'

*Grass roots education:* e.g. supporting children and others in audit projects in relation to the biodiversity profile of their local environment

## Education not Edification

Most biodiversity communication is educational (i.e. geared towards imparting knowledge), rather than edifying (seeking to build insight).



### The Biodiversity media ghetto

The media's appetite for confrontation and bad news continue to make it difficult to reach out with positive messages in editorial media, creating a need for much more direct (unmediated) engagement with stakeholders.

### (Semi)-Effective Mass Media

Notwithstanding the above, mass media have proven effective at sensitising us to the plights of individual species: seals, pandas, elephants, tigers and whales.

### Light-touch co-ordination

Despite the fact that biodiversity is a global issue, demanding international collaboration, global collaboration efforts have been few and poorly funded.

*Only through thinking through and overcoming these hurdles will we stand a chance of reaching the overall objective...*

### **Question 11 asks: What are the goals of Biodiversity?**

Biodiversity is not simply a description of the world. It has a purpose, which includes at least the following components:

#### Conservation

- The conservation of existing species.
- The conservation of existing habitats.
- The conservation of existing ecosystems.

#### Management

- The effective management of existing ecosystems.
- The replenishment and resuscitation of damaged ecosystems.

#### Sustainability

- The sustainable exploitation of existing resources.

*These aims are rarely quantified and rarely explained to key stakeholders. Biodiversity communicators must be willing to concede a little scientific and philosophical purity in pursuit of these higher aims.*

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Having explored the 11 questions in depth, the paper concludes that Biodiversity faces two distinct brand challenges, which should ideally be tackled together:

1. To develop a much more compelling emotional story – creating an umbrella communications campaign which would support and contextualise more specific stakeholder efforts.
2. To personalise the benefits of biodiversity – exploring a myriad creative ways to make the impact of biodiversity visible in everyday life.

The first priority, however, is to continue the process of open dialogue and engagement among all those who care about biodiversity. This allows multiple groups to share and consolidate lessons and best practice in communications.

**For further dialogue and debate, do contact: [timk@glasshousepartnership.com](mailto:timk@glasshousepartnership.com)**