



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE CONSERVATION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Newsletter

May 2014



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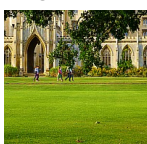
An introduction to UCCRI

I am delighted to write this note to introduce the University of Cambridge Conservation Research Institute (UCCRI).

UCCRI has been established to promote and foster inter-disciplinary research on biodiversity conservation and the social context within which humans engage with nature. The Institute builds on a considerable legacy of distinguished scholarship in Cambridge, which has contributed to our understanding of the dynamics of life on earth, as well as how society interacts with, and shapes the world that we inhabit.

In introducing UCCRI, it is worth reflecting on two themes that define its work – **inter-disciplinarity**, and the **conservation of biodiversity**.

There is widespread recognition of the importance of working across disciplinary boundaries to address the major intellectual and societal issues of our time. The 'global challenges' that attract major funders and grant-making bodies demand large collaborative teams. Governments, businesses and civil society, and the problems that they confront, are rarely organised along disciplinary lines.



However, an inter-disciplinary research agenda remains challenging within conventional University structures. Conversations across disciplinary boundaries can be difficult, imbued with differences in ways of thinking, methods, knowledge systems and values. Career structures, publication opportunities and peer-review processes tend to reinforce specialism within narrow sub-disciplines, as do institutional structures and boundaries that are largely created for administrative convenience.

Within this landscape, UCCRI provides a space to explore the understanding that emerges when disciplinary silos are broken down, and to foster productive – often mutually critical – dialogue between colleagues from across the



University. Pursuing common agendas from a variety of intellectual starting points creates possibilities for meaningful conversations and significant advances in knowledge.

Perhaps one area where such intellectual exchange offers greatest potential is in relation to conservation. Research in this area requires a broad engagement with the ecological and social systems that shape, constrain and influence the ways in which humans interact with, and transform, nature. This requires insights and inputs from a wide range of perspectives – from spatial and temporal data, and models that document and predict ecosystem change, to the values, governance, political and behavioural contexts which determine the types of interventions that society is willing to implement, and the likelihood of their effectiveness.



Many Cambridge colleagues might not immediately recognise their work as being relevant to debates about the conservation of biodiversity.

UCCRI hopes to facilitate conversations that bring a much wider network of scholars into constructive dialogue and collaboration with more well-established traditions of conservation research within the University.

Our hope is that these conversations will prove mutually interesting, and that UCCRI will be able to foster meaningful interaction between and across disciplines, to deepen our understanding of biodiversity conservation, its context and impacts.

This, our first newsletter, sets out some of the activities that we have been promoting over the last few months, and ways in which colleagues can get involved with our work. I hope that many will find this of interest, and will seek us out to explore new ideas.

Dr Bhaskar Vira
Founding Director, UCCRI



The River Lark, Cambridgeshire

(courtesy: S Harvey)

UCCRI is currently building a research directory that will comprise conservation researchers across the University



Peruvian Amazon Rainforest

(courtesy: E.Chenery)

MEET THE TEAM AT UCCRI

DR BHASKAR VIRA



Bhaskar Vira is the Founding Director of the UCCRI, and took up this role from September 2013.

Bhaskar is trained as an economist, is based at the Department of Geography, and is a Fellow of Fitzwilliam College.

Bhaskar's research interests centre on the changing political economy of development, especially in India; and on political ecology, focusing on forests, wildlife and land use change, and the social and political context for biodiversity conservation. Bhaskar's work on incentives for natural resource use and management deals with trade-offs and discourses relating to the concept of ecosystem services, and how this overlaps with poverty and human well-being, as well as values for biodiversity conservation.

Email: uccri-director@conservation.cam.ac.uk

ALISON HARVEY



Alison Harvey joined UCCRI in October 2013 as the Research Programme Administrator.

Alison is responsible for outreach and communication activities, such as forming networks and organising events to bring together conservation-related researchers from across the University, alongside participants from the wider conservation community. She is also involved in fund-raising, especially in supporting collaborative research bids, and in building links with research partners, both within Cambridge and in the national and global context.

Email: uccri-administrator@conservation.cam.ac.uk



Our Focus

- *Inter-disciplinary, collaborative approach*
- *Conservation collaborating with the social sciences, arts and humanities, and natural sciences*
- *Exploring knowledge systems, values, methods & tools*
- *Developing a database of Cambridge research*
- *Promoting new ways of approaching challenging biodiversity conservation issues*



Bwindi Co-operative Women's Group, Uganda
(courtesy: C.Sandbrook)

A brief history of Cambridge conservation

The Cambridge Conservation Forum (CCF) was established in 1998, with the aim of connecting the diverse community of conservation practitioners and researchers working at local, national and international levels based in and around Cambridge.

In 2006, University of Cambridge academics, initially from the Departments of Zoology and Geography, came together to create an informal Conservation Working Group (CWG) providing advice to the Vice Chancellor and Pro-VC for Research. Over time, this group expanded to include the Departments of Land Economy, Plant Sciences, the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership and the Judge Business School.

In 2007, the Cambridge Conservation Initiative (CCI) was established, as a

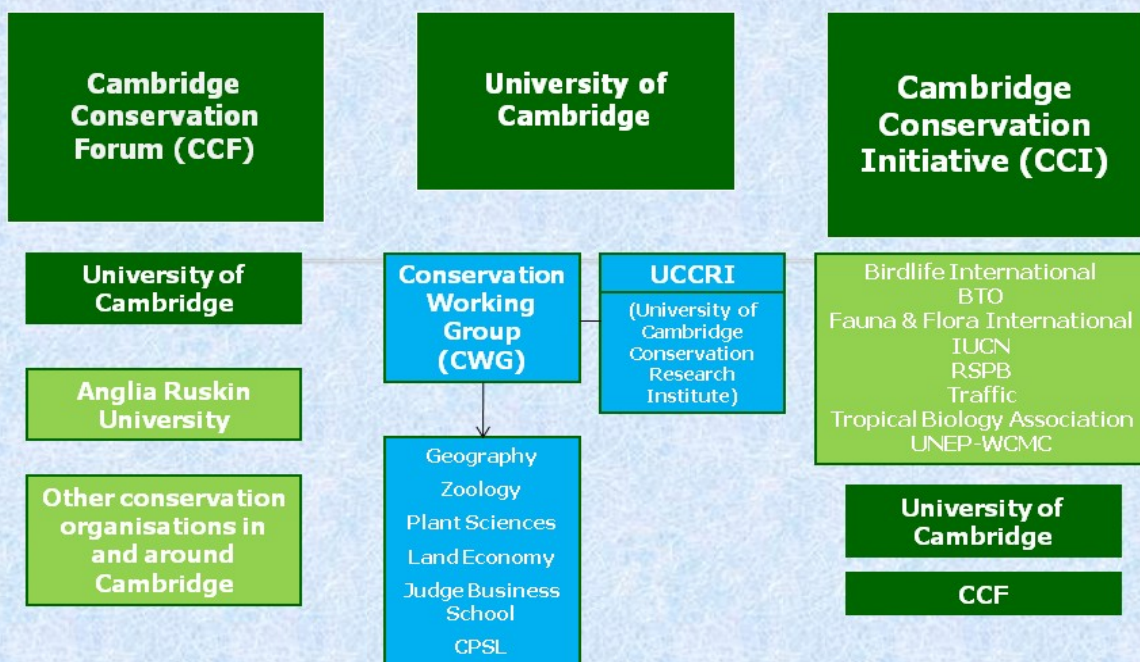
unique collaboration between the University of Cambridge, eight internationally focused conservation organisations; and CCF.

In 2008, the Pro-VC Research suggested that an eventual model for co-ordinating conservation research within the University of Cambridge might be the creation of an inter-disciplinary, cross-departmental Institute, the UCCRI. The University recognised conservation as one of its Strategic Research Initiatives in 2010, and UCCRI was established in September 2013.

In 2015, when the Conservation Campus is completed on the New Museums Site, UCCRI will be co-located with other CCI partners, further enabling dialogue and collaboration between conservation practitioners and University researchers.

“Collaborative research that transforms our understanding of biodiversity conservation”

CONSERVATION LANDSCAPE IN CAMBRIDGE



Activities since September 2013

THE BRIEF....

Expand the base for conservation research

Recruit a broader range of academics engaged with conservation research

Promote interdisciplinarity

Find ways to fit impact and policy advice with academic rewards structures

Look beyond Cambridge to build global networks and alliances



UCCRI Research Directory



Montage photos courtesy: Libby Blanchard



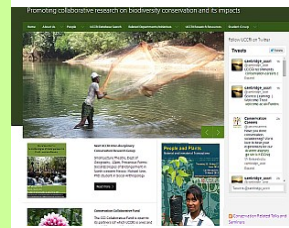
One of the first things we have set out to do is establish a research directory. This comprises the name and research information of anyone working in conservation from any discipline. We hope that, in time, researchers will use this database to find others working in the same area but in a different department with whom they might

collaborate and develop a novel and innovative approach to conservation issues.

We are actively looking for academics, postdocs and graduates who would be happy to be listed in our database from any department encompassing the social sciences and arts and humanities, as well as the natural sciences



If you would like to be registered in our database please go to our website and complete the online form..



Interdisciplinarity—supporting research across the University

Graduate Group

The UCCRI successfully bid for funds from the University's ESRC Doctoral Training Centre and has been able to establish an interdisciplinary graduate student interest group, which meets fortnightly. Activities that are taking place include training in research methods (visual and statistical), a symposium focusing on inter-disciplinarity and funding to support ten students on institutional visits over the next few months.



Visiting Professorship

A five year programme of high profile visitors (the Humanitas Visiting Professorship in Sustainability Studies), externally funded, has been established at Cambridge, linked with CRASSH. The first visitor was Professor Gretchen Daily from Stanford University, who visited in October-November 2013. UCCRI will host and co-ordinate these visits for the next four years, in collaboration with CRASSH and CCI.

Our website

Set up in October 2013, our website provides a searchable research database, research resources including publications, funding opportunities, tools and methodologies, and web resources for scholars working on biodiversity conservation.

Promoting collaborative research on biodiversity conservation and its impacts

Home About Us People UCCRI Database Search Related Departments/Initiatives Student Group Social Media

Our Vision: The UCCRI provides a focal point for research on the processes and drivers that affect, frame and constitute the context for biodiversity conservation and its impacts, that cuts across disciplinary and departmental boundaries.

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Events

Research

Funding

Resources

Conservation Related Talks and Seminars

Wed 07 May 11:00: Conceptual models of ocean heat and carbon uptake [IF external to BAS, please email the organiser in advance to gain access to the building](#)

Wed 07 May 13:15: What has become of the 'eco-city'?

Wed 07 May 16:00: Scott Lecture II : Counting and controlling photons non-destructively.

Wed 07 May 19:30: Excluded but not Defeated: The Constructive Resilience of Bahá'ís in Iran in Light of Education

Faith leaders need to find their voice on climate change

Religious institutions need to find their voice and set their moral compass on one of the great humanitarian issues of our time. Saving the Earth and its peoples from dangerous climate change is an economic, social and environmental issue – and a moral and ethical one too that goes to the core of many if not all of the world's great faiths.

Dolphin whistle warnings: Remotely monitoring acoustical changes in dolphin whistles may be powerful new tool for conservation.

A team of researchers in Italy, Portugal, Spain, France, Britain and the United States has demonstrated that remotely monitoring the acoustical structures of dolphin vocalizations can effectively detect "evolutionarily significant units" of the mammal – distinct populations that may be tracked for prioritizing and planning conservation efforts.

China-Africa relations: Fresh perspectives from Chinese journalists on environmental challenges

Chinese journalists rarely report from Africa. As a result, the Chinese public knows little about the continent – and

<http://research-institute.conservation.cam.ac.uk>

Public engagement, social media and recruitment

Public engagement and social media

We have been busy setting up our website, developing a database, engaging with outreach activities, such as the Science Festival, Student Conference for Conservation Science, and setting up an Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Group.

We have also become actively involved with social media, including a Twitter account



Game of Life

UCCRI graduate students devised and ran a conservation game for youngsters as part of the Science Festival. This was so successful that we hope to set it up as a computer package and made available to teachers and parents in the near future.

The Competition of Life Game

"In a world of finite resources do you take as much as you can or work with others to plan for an unpredictable future?"

Thursday - February 27th, 2014
12:00 - 1:00 pm, Room 206
William Hardy Building, Downing Site



Academics and graduates from Zoology, Plant Sciences and Geography registered with the UCCRI provided a variety of events from Managing Invasive Species, Life of the Dragon Fly to the Competition of Life Game and a talk on LiDAR and sensors in forest ecology.

Festival of PLANTS

The Transformational Role of Plants in Meeting the Zero Hunger Challenge

Professor M. S. Swaminathan
Saturday 17 May 2014, 14:00
Auditorium, Sainsbury Laboratory
47 Bateman Street, Cambridge, CB2 1LR

Professor Swaminathan is widely celebrated for his leadership of India's Green Revolution. He holds a number of international awards and citations and is an acknowledged world leader in the field of sustainable food security.

This event is free but ticketed. Tickets and further information are available from: <http://zero-hunger.eventbrite.co.uk>



UCCRI co-hosted a public lecture by Professor M S Swaminathan, widely celebrated for his leadership of India's Green Revolution. The event was part of the **Festival of Plants**.



UCCRI Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Group

The group began in December 2013 and has held regular meetings. Graduates include students from Law and Social Anthropology as well as those from Land Economy, Zoology, Plant Sciences and Geography. The group hopes to expand to include graduates from other disciplines; anyone is welcome if they have an interest in conservation and society. There is a Student Group page on the UCCRI website with details of previous talks and upcoming events. Some of the events so far are featured on this page.

Group discussion: Why are younger countries worse for conservation?

There are obvious economic predictors of ability and willingness to invest in environmental sustainability. Yet, given that environmental decisions represent trade-offs between present sacrifices and uncertain future benefits, psychological factors may also play a role in country-level environmental behavior. Gott's principle suggests that citizens may use perceptions of their country's age to predict its future continuation, with longer pasts predicting longer futures. Using country- and individual-level analyses, we examined whether longer perceived pasts result in longer perceived futures, which in turn motivate concern for continued environmental quality. Study 1 found that older countries scored higher on an environmental performance index, even when the analysis controlled for country-level differences in gross domestic product and governance. Study 2 showed that when the United States was framed as an old country (vs. a young one), participants were willing to donate more money to an environmental organization.

Group discussion: What do conservationists think about re-wilding?

Huge areas in Europe's countryside are becoming abandoned. From a nature conservation standpoint, the land abandonment represents both a huge threat and at the same time a huge opportunity to reclaim at least some of all the wild lands and wilderness areas that Europe lost during the past centuries. This could be the biggest opportunity ever for wildlife and wilderness in Europe. And what is also really interesting is that this might very well turn out economically much more profitable than the previous, outcompeted ways of using those same lands now trying to survive on subsidies.



Presentation by Michael Vine, Social Anthropology: Social Ecologies of Endangerment in North-western Mexico

The loss of biodiversity, the mass extinction of species, and the precarious state and fate of the world's oceans are widely agreed to be crucial political, technical, and otherwise social issues in the twenty-first century. Within this context, the Gulf of California has emerged as a shifting signifier of abundance and fragility, of disaster and salvation, of hope, nostalgia, and fear—an inextricably material and discursive form. For my PhD, I propose to interrogate the social production of endangerment, extinction, and other modes of precariousness in and around the Gulf. By examining ethnographically the practices of place-making that bring the region into being, I will ask how certain objects come to matter as things of concern, care, and contestation—that is, as precarious forms. In turn, I will ask how the idea and objects of endangerment are reconfiguring social relations and practice in north-western Mexico and beyond. Working with scientists, activists, and local communities, I will tackle questions about the materiality, morality, and temporality of endangerment as it is inhabited and experienced across multiple scales of knowledge, sentiment, and social life.

Presentation by Katy Jeary, Geography: Trade-offs between agricultural development and biodiversity conservation in Uganda

As global demand for food and land grows there is increasing pressure to convert tropical forests to agriculture. Although an important source of food and income that accounts for over 50% of GDP in developing countries, agriculture is also a major driver of biodiversity loss. As the majority of biodiversity exists outside protected areas, it is critical we find ways of maximizing both agricultural output and biodiversity across a variety of land uses. Several mechanisms and framings for the reconciliation of agricultural production and biodiversity conservation have been proposed: land sparing and land-sharing; the sustainable intensification of agriculture, the Green Economy and market-based mechanisms, to name a few. This presentation will outline proposed research to investigate how agent-based landscape modelling might guide decision making, explore and minimise the trade-offs between biodiversity conservation and agricultural development, and ultimately improve outcomes for smallholder farmers and forest biodiversity.

FOCUS ON.....

Two graduates who are registered with the UCCRI and actively involved with the graduate student group.



(Courtesy: L.Blanchard)

Libby Blanchard, Geography

Libby is funded by a Gates Scholarship to pursue a PhD at Cambridge. She began by studying for an MPhil in Environment, Society and Development, to learn how best to negotiate environmental pressures when alleviating poverty through economic growth. Libby is particularly interested in developing policies that address both extreme poverty and biodiversity loss--two of the most critical challenges of our era.

Before coming to Cambridge, she worked for six years directing international development and conservation



initiatives for a coffee importing company. In this role, she raised over \$4 million for livelihood improvement programs, some of which were featured at the Clinton Global Initiative and in National Geographic's Wild Chronicles series.

Starting her PhD at the same time as the UCCRI began, Libby's research focuses on climate change mitigation policies and their impacts on people and biodiversity.

“Promoting collaborative research on biodiversity conservation and its impacts”

Aiora Zabala, Land Economy

Aiora is an environmental and social scientist studying individual behaviour and decision-making towards sustainable systems. Her interests span across environmental and sustainability policy, ecological economics, political ecology, complex and social-ecological systems, and forest and biodiversity conservation. Her PhD research is fully funded by the Department of Research of the Basque Government, to work on incentives for the adoption of silvopasture in the tropical forest frontier. She has studied in Barcelona and Oxford and has



conducted fieldwork in low-income rural areas of South Africa and Chiapas (Mexico). She works on quantitative and qualitative methodologies, using R and Linux. She is currently learning to integrate R and GIS, and to model ecosystem services. Next she would like to investigate, among others, the potential of the concept of 'permanence' as a goal for more sustainable decision-making and the long term impact of payments on crowding out intrinsic motivations for conservation.



Aiora won best poster award at Ecological Economics and Institutional Dynamics 2013

UCCRI—PLANNED ACTIVITIES

We will be building our research directory into a comprehensive, searchable database. To build it, we will continue to actively search for all graduates and academics across the University whose work relates to conservation and society.

As the hub of conservation research within the University, we will continue to build our resources and facilitate collaborative research between disciplines.

The UCCRI Inter-disciplinary Graduate Student Group will be running an internal conference for graduate students across the

disciplines to present their work and participate in a series of workshops. The conference will be in September 2014 and calls for papers will be going out very soon.

UCCRI will be participating in the University's Festival of Ideas in October 2014 with a series of conservation related events.

We are delighted to announce that Professor Johan Rockstrom, from the Stockholm Resilience Centre, will hold the Humanitas Visiting Professorship in Sustainability Studies in 2014-15.



Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda
(Courtesy: C.Sandbrook)



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