



An Initiative of DIVERSITAS
2001-2002

Advisory Board

Maria Alice S. Alves
State University of Rio de Janeiro

Manuel Arango
CONCORD

Neil Chalmers
The Natural History Museum

Peter Crane
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Sylvia Earle
Sustainable Seas Expeditions

Paul Ehrlich
Stanford University

Calestous Juma
Harvard University

Thomas Lovejoy
The World Bank

Jane Lubchenco
ICSU

Jeffrey McNeely
IUCN

Russell Mittermeier
Conservation International

Stuart Pimm
Columbia University

Peter Raven
Missouri Botanical Garden

Edward O. Wilson
Harvard University

Chair • **Diana H. Wall**, Colorado State University • *Vice-Chair* • **Geoffrey A. Boxshall**, The Natural History Museum

Steering Committee • **Andrew Dobson**, Princeton University • **Ivan Hattingsh**, World Wide Fund for Nature • **Tohru Nakashizuka**, DIWPA • **Valery Neronov**, Russian DIVERSITAS • **Cristián Samper**, Chair, Convention for Biological Diversity, SBSSTTA-5 • **James Seyani**, Commonwealth Science Council

Ex Officio • **José Sarukhán**, Chair, DIVERSITAS • **Peter Bridgewater**, UNESCO MAB • **Harold Mooney**, ICSU

For Immediate Release:
Feb 8, 2001

Contact: Gina Adams
Tel: (+1) 970 491-1984
Fax: (+1) 970 491 3945
Email: gadams@nrel.colostate.edu
Web: <http://www.nrel.colostate.edu/IBOY/>

GLOBAL TEAM OF SCIENTISTS LAUNCH 'INTERNATIONAL BIODIVERSITY OBSERVATION YEAR' TO PROMOTE SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION, RAISE AWARENESS

FORT COLLINS, CO. – DIVERSITAS, an international consortium of non-governmental and inter-governmental scientific research organizations, has launched the International Biodiversity Observation Year, or IBOY. Scientists, biologists and ecologists around the world have committed to making 2001 and 2002 breakthrough years in reaching out to share their findings about the global status of biodiversity and how it relates to human welfare.

Globally, decisions on sustainable development are being undermined by a lack of current understanding of the living world and its biological wealth and diversity, according to a group of prominent biologists and ecologists writing in the latest issue of *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, which marks the launch of the IBOY. Improving knowledge about biodiversity may be the greatest scientific and educational challenge of the twenty-first century, say this international team of researchers.

“Exploring biodiversity will unlock many benefits, through discovery of new genes and chemicals that can be used for drugs, to improve crops or to restore polluted land,” said Diana Wall, biologist at Colorado State University, USA, and Chair of the IBOY, “More importantly, learning where new species are, their role in maintaining healthy ecosystems and how we can conserve them is vital for making informed decisions about our land, rivers and oceans.”

IUBS • SCOPE • UNESCO • ICSU • IGBP • IUMS

DIVERSITAS IBOY Secretariat, Scientific Programme Officer, Dr. Gina Adams
Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1499, USA
Phone: +1 970 491 1984 • Fax: +1 970 491 3945 • Email: iboy@nrel.colostate.edu
Visit the IBOY webpage: <http://www.nrel.colostate.edu/IBOY>

At the heart of IBOY are more than 40 international scientific research projects that will report important new information on global biodiversity. Using the latest technologies, such as genetic tools to conserve endangered species and geographical information systems to produce the first atlas of marine life, scientists involved with IBOY will report on projects ranging from surveys of life in the canopies of tropical forests to the deepest depths of the Atlantic Ocean.

Jeffrey McNeely, Chief Scientist at the World Conservation Union and a member of the Advisory Board for the IBOY, describes biodiversity loss as “the quintessential global issue” since the over-consumption of resources occurs far away from the natural habitats and species that may be lost in producing the resources. “Given the global roots of the problem,” McNeely said. “International collaboration on research is crucial in addressing some of the most important issues facing society today.”

Stuart Pimm, well-known biologist at Columbia University, USA and a member of the IBOY Advisory Board, warns that a third of all species could be on a path to extinction within the next few decades. “Extinction rates are now 100 to 1000 times the background rate expected without human influence and those rates are accelerating,” Pimm said. If current changes in land use continue, Pimm believes “the total loss of biodiversity will compare to those during the previous five mass extinction events in Earth’s geological history.”

Wall emphasizes how little is known about global biodiversity. “Scientists have described about 1.75 million species but we estimate there are over 12 million species still to be described,” Wall said. “We simply don’t have good information on their distribution, whether they are plentiful or endangered or their role in providing goods and services that we get from ecosystems, such as renewal of soil fertility, decomposition of waste and purification of water.”

Several educational projects geared toward the general public are also part of the IBOY. These include a museum exhibit which will travel across Europe and the United States, a digital library, accessible on the web, which will save the images and sounds of extinct and endangered species for future generations and an IMAX film explaining the links between people and nature. A special education webpage for children was launched in January and, later in the year, an internet chat session with IBOY’s biodiversity experts will be scheduled. Details of projects and notice of special events can be found on IBOY’s webpage at: www.nrel.colostate.edu/IBOY/

DIVERSITAS, the science team who launched IBOY, was established in 1991 and is headquartered in Paris. The only existing umbrella program to coordinate a broad research effort in the biodiversity sciences at the global level, DIVERSITAS is sponsored by the International Union of Biological Sciences, Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment, United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, International Council for Science,
International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme and International Union of Microbiological
Societies.

- 30 -



An Initiative of DIVERSITAS
2001-2002