

THE WORLD CLIMATE CONFERENCE: A CONFERENCE OF EXPERTS ON CLIMATE AND MANKIND, HELD IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, DURING 12–23 FEBRUARY 1979

The World Climate Conference, organized mainly by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and held near their headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, was the first international conference of its kind, with the topics discussed ranging over the entire spectrum of knowledge and issues related to climate. Indeed, there was considerable emphasis placed on the many complex and vital questions having to do with the impact of climatic variability (from year to year) and climatic change (from decade to decade or century to century) on human affairs.

The first week of the Conference, following the welcoming remarks from the several international organizations that had cooperated with WMO in organizing it, was devoted to the presentation of some 25 overview papers. This part of the Conference was open to invited participants, and nearly 400 people from many parts of the world participated. The President was Dr Robert M. White, of Washington, D.C.

The topics covered by the overview papers were grouped under several main headings that demonstrate the broad sweep of the subject: The global system that determines climate, influences of mankind on the climatic system, and impacts of climate on mankind. Under the last were grouped those activities that are clearly sensitive to the vagaries of weather and climate, including water resources, human health, agriculture, forestry, land-use, fisheries and offshore development, and the economies of nations and of the world.

The second week of the Conference was attended by a smaller group of about 120 invited experts, including the speakers and sessional chairmen of the previous week, and four working groups were organized to deal with the five topics considered to be central to the issue of climatic change. These are: the provision of better climatic data of all kinds, the application of the knowledge of climate to human affairs, the study of the impacts of climatic change on society, research on climatic change and variability, and (a theme that threads through all the others) the influence of society on climatic change and variability. As was made clear in the Declaration of the Conference (appearing elsewhere in this issue*), the realization that humanity can in fact influence the climate of the Earth in a very significant way, is one of the reasons for the growing importance of considerations of climate—and a reason for the establishment by WMO of the World Climate Programme (see *Environmental Conservation*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 293–4, Winter 1978).

Summaries of the overview papers were available to the participants, and the Conference Proceedings (containing the full texts of the papers and the reports of the working groups) will be published by the WMO in the Summer of 1979. It is certain that this rather substantial volume will be a major source of authoritative information on the wide range of problems relating to climate and its impacts on society. Furthermore, the working group reports will serve as the basis for implementing the new World Climate Programme, and they

can also provide guidance for the national climate programmes that are being fostered in many countries.

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CONFERENCE OF PARTIES TO THE 'WASHINGTON' CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES, HELD IN SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA, 19–30 MARCH 1979

On this occasion of the second conference on the 'Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora' (CITES), which had been signed in Washington in 1973, some 260 delegates from 50 countries reached agreement on new international measures to protect the world's vanishing wildlife resources. Sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme, the two-weeks' meeting was inaugurated by Costa Rica's head of state, President Rodrigo Carazo.

The purpose of the Convention is to curb and control the world-wide traffic in rare animals and plants, and the equally booming trade in wildlife products such as ivory, leopard skins, turtle meat, and reptiles' hides—all of which are currently manufactured into luxury items. Membership of the Convention now includes many of the principal 'wildlife-importing' states (including USA, USSR, Canada, Australia, and most of Western Europe), and Third-World countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which are 'producers' and exporters of wildlife and wildlife products. Several states which are not yet members attended the San José meeting as observers and announced their intention of ratifying the treaty soon (among them were Israel, Japan, Mexico, and the Netherlands). China sent a five-men delegation from Peking, and distributed a report on its nature conservation programmes.

More than 50 non-governmental organizations, mostly from the USA, also participated as observers. These included a 'coalition' of 32 environmental conservation groups ranging from the World Wildlife Fund and the US Environmental Defense Fund, to the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wild Birds Society of Japan. The coalition alone effectively outbalanced the lobby of observers from the pet-trade and the fur-trade industries.

The San José Conference agreed on a series of new measures to improve governmental controls over imports and exports of all wildlife threatened with extinction, to assist national customs agents in identifying endangered plant and animal species, and to collaborate with Interpol in the fight against illegal wildlife traffic. The Convention's lists of protected species were enlarged to include all whales and smaller cetaceans (such as dolphins and porpoises), all birds-of-prey (including owls), and a number of other species of animals and plants whose survival is considered to be in jeopardy.

The Conference heard alarming statements from Kenya and Tanzania on the decline of the Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), which is now on the brink of extinction owing to poaching and illegal trade. On the

*See pp. 137–8.—Ed.