



DCNA

Safeguarding nature in the Dutch Caribbean

Board meeting

DCNA's May Board was all about connecting with conservation our friends and partner organisations abroad

IUCN NL

Director of IUCN NL, Willem Ferwerda talks about the increasing support for DCNA in the Netherlands
Page 2

Turtle tracking

Mabel Nava shares her vision on the joint STCB-DCNA turtle conservation work underway in the Dutch Caribbean.
Page 2

DCNA Trust Fund

Financial expert and DCNA Board Vice Chair Leendert van Driel explains DCNA's Trust Fund
Page 3

CI partnership

Mike Smith shares his experiences working with DCNA on biodiversity conservation in the Dutch Caribbean
Page 3

Sustainable funding

DCNA shares its fund raising successes and strategy for the future
Page 4

Board meeting May 2007

Before the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) was ever officially registered the Board had already developed a three year strategic plan. In the meantime DCNA has gone from a great idea to a fully-fledged organization supporting the six islands of the Dutch Caribbean and their ten protected areas. The May Board meeting was particularly important because it gave DCNA the opportunity not only to network with our overseas partners but to launch into a new multiyear planning process with their active participation .

The meeting was the first of a two part planning, process which will result in the completion of a new



DCNA Board members, staff and overseas partners attending DCNA's May Board meeting on Bonaire

multiyear plan by the 31st December 2007. As a first step in any multiyear planning process it is customary to examine the 'external landscape' and to identify organisations working in the same or similar fields, looking for synergies as well as

potential areas of conflict. Rather than doing this as a desk exercise, DCNA decided to actively involve our overseas partners in this process.

DCNA was privileged to welcome representatives of Conservation International, De Landschappen, IUCN NL, MilieuKontakt International, Samenwerkingsverband Nationale Parken and Vogelbescherming all of whom contributed significantly to the success of the meeting.

Besides networking, the meeting was used to brainstorm and explore opportunities for future co-operation through facilitated discussion.

Vice President Leendert van Driel, who chaired the meeting, was very pleased with the level of participation and felt it constituted a crucial first step towards building strong and mutually beneficial relationships with external organisations.



IUCN NL: a new way of working

Nature conservation in the Dutch Caribbean is finally on the map for the people of the Netherlands, according to Willem Ferwerda, director of IUCN NL. 'Attitudes in the Netherlands have undergone considerable shift over the last year or so,' he says. 'We have made some big breakthroughs in raising support for, and awareness of, conservation efforts in the Dutch Caribbean among politicians and conservationists.'

For decades, nature in the Dutch Caribbean barely registered on the radar of most conservationists in the Netherlands, who were busy fighting battles at home to save and safeguard their own unique landscape and wildlife. Then IUCN NL decided to use its influence as a well-respected international conservation union to begin changing that situation.

His organisation spearheaded the formation of a support group for DCNA in the Netherlands, bringing on board respected international groups such as the World Wildlife Fund, Birdlife NL, Conservation International and important domestic conservation bodies such as Natuurmonumenten, Staatsbosbeheer and De Landschappen.

'Our intention was to reach out to government officials, conservation organisations and policy makers and show them the importance of biodiversity in the Dutch Caribbean to conservation efforts as a whole,' says Willem. 'We convinced them that the Dutch biodiversity hotspots are all located in the Dutch Caribbean.'

'We have lobbied and informed politicians and conservation leaders and, over the last year, I think we have greatly increased understanding of, and support for, the Dutch Caribbean's conservation effort. 'That is starting to show itself in talk about commitments to projects in the Dutch Caribbean and attracting potential donors to the region's nature conservation trust fund.'

Willem can point to concrete evidence of a growing willingness in the Netherlands to commit major funds to nature conservation in the islands once regarded as distant and rather peripheral former colonies



Earlier this year, DCNA and their Dutch Partners were hugely influential in securing grant funding from the Dutch government providing DCNA with 1 million Euro a year for the next ten years which will be fed into a trust fund. The endowment fund, once fully capitalized, will cover the running costs of one marine and one terrestrial protected area on each of the six islands of the Dutch Caribbean.

The Dutch government's decision was the biggest landmark so far for DCNA. It has also meant building a whole new relationship between IUCN NL and DCNA and reevaluating the role of DCNA's partner organisations in the Netherlands, which meet under Willem's chairmanship.

'Until then we were simply DCNA's 'good friend' in the Netherlands, supporting their efforts and reassuring them that they were not alone,' he says. Now IUCN NL is the clearing house between the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and DCNA.

Willems admits that this switch in roles could have been a source of friction. But he feels that the organisational strength of both IUCN NL and DCNA has produced a positive result and that DCNA is now proving its worth. 'It is making it so much easier for us to work toward securing even more funding in the future.'

Willem says that he and the other support group members will be working to encourage DCNA to throw their funding net still wider in the years ahead. 'We feel it's important that DCNA should have closer links to South America,' he says. 'We will be encouraging the organisation to look at ways of tapping into existing trust fund networks and knowledge in Latin America in the future.'

[Photo: IUCN NL's Willem Ferwerda and a meeting of DCNA's partners in the Netherlands]



Turtle tracking update 2007

Sea turtle conservation has formed the core of the project work supported by DCNA right from its inception. Ranging from a comprehensive multi-island outreach and education programme in 2004 to state of the art satellite tracking projects on St Eustatius, St Maarten and most recently on Bonaire initiated by respected turtle biologist Dr Robert van Dam.

This year DCNA has taken its concern for turtle conservation to the next level by forging a close cooperative working relationship with in a small but significant turtle conservation group founded on Bonaire in 1991 called Sea Turtle Conservation Bonaire (STCB). In just over a decade and a half the dedicated board, staff and volunteers of this local foundation have effectively taken turtle off the menu and put them into the hearts and minds of islanders and tourists alike.

Research, conservation and education projects carried out by STCB are effectively confronting the multiple threats to the survival of the remaining populations of these much-loved and mysterious creatures. In the process, STCB have perfected skills in countering problems of development, human encroachment into turtle foraging areas, problems of poaching and entanglement in fishing nets and lines, and disease.

Now, STCB manager Mabel Nava believes it's time to start sharing, 'Our vision is that we will become a Centre of Excellence'. A place other islands can look toward as a role model and an important regional centre of information not only on turtle biology and conservation but field monitoring and study techniques. This is a vision which DCNA shares.

Funding from DCNA will allow Mabel to add outreach and educational material their website. Park staff from throughout the Dutch Caribbean will be able to come to Bonaire for training in turtle monitoring and tagging techniques.

With turtle tracking work starting up throughout the Dutch Caribbean, the first time, we will begin to know where 'our' turtles go. 'That will obviously tell us what sort of conservation strategy is most likely to produce good results,' says Mabel.



Trust Fund: investment gets real

Financial expert and Board Vice Chair Leendert van Driel explains about the DCNA Trust Fund.

DCNA's investment strategy for the trust fund is now being managed by the major Swiss-based investment bank, Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS). Most of the capital is being invested in medium to high-risk shares spread across the world's major markets.

'This will ensure that highest possible return on our investment,' Leendert explained. 'We can afford to invest in higher risk shares because we are investing for a long period and can therefore ride out the up and down cycles of the international markets.' Leendert and a specially-formed fund-raising committee are now examining the most effective ways of raising capital for the fund.

'We have a few immediate targets,' he says. 'For example, we have submitted a new application to the Dutch Postcode Lottery in the Netherlands.' However, while Latin America has been suggested as a possible source of further funding, the DCNA board vice chairperson feels their energies should be focused on Europe.

'We will be looking at how trust funds in Latin and South America raise their money and distribute it,' he says. 'But actually that region is such a different beast from fund-raising perspective that I don't, at this stage, feel we should invest too much energy there. 'Instead I think that various sources linked to the European Union are definitely worth pursuing.'

Looking further ahead, Leendert and his colleagues will be devising a plan for good governance, and working out the best way to release the proceeds to the islands once it is fully capitalised in ten years time.

'We'll also be keeping a close eye on our investment bankers UBS to ensure that they are doing the best possible job on our behalf.'

C.I supporting field research

Conservation International (CI) is thoroughly enjoying a growing and successful relationship with the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, according to Michael Smith, director of CI's Caribbean Biodiversity Initiative.

The major world conservation organization, based in Washington DC, has been working closely with scientists and nature experts to support biodiversity conservation efforts of DCNA and Netherlands Antilles Environmental Department, for several years.

Joint projects are already successfully demonstrating the importance to wildlife conservation of 'biodiversity hotspots' such as Saba Bank, a huge underwater mountain plateau off the tiny Dutch Caribbean island of Saba, as well as collating a groundbreaking 'virtual museum' of local flora and fauna. 'It's rare for us to be able to team up with an organization that has so many strengths and skills to offer,' he says. 'The DCNA are wonderful partners.'

DCNA was a natural fit when CI came looking for someone to work with on far-reaching conservation projects in the Dutch Caribbean. And CI is well positioned to draw on scientists and resources from top US universities such as Harvard to advance their plans. But, as Michael explains, he faces an uphill battle without strong support in a region.

'We believe that conservation work must be carried out locally by local organizations who understand the history, politics and needs of their area,' he says 'Often we find that colonial history has left some areas of the world with fairly weak institutions with which to organise conservation initiatives.' So we were pleasantly surprised when we discovered that wasn't the case in the Dutch Caribbean.

'In the shape of organizations such as the DCNA and MINA we had strong partners with the specialists and experts from complex sets of institutions that we could rely on and deal with as equals.'

The joint DCNA/CI marine surveying expedition to Saba Bank in 2006 made headlines around the world and proved how effective the partnership could be.

A team of divers and scientists discovered at least two species of fish unknown to science and mapped an amazingly diverse underwater environment in urgent need of protection from heavy tanker traffic to and from the major oil installation on the nearby Dutch Caribbean island of St Eustatius.

Armed with data from the expedition, DCNA and CI have begun lobbying and campaigning to have the waters around Saba Bank designated as a Protected Sea Area which would safeguard them from the risks of major ship strikes and oil spillages. 'Working together, we've assembled a compelling case for offering legal protection to this globally-important biodiversity hotspot,' says Michael. 'Neither organization could have done it alone.'

Meanwhile, scientists and staff have been hard at work on the island of Saba, gathering the raw data to put a 'virtual herbarium', detailing plant species on the island and making the results available to the world on the internet.

Experts from Harvard and from the New York Botanical Garden have already completed stunningly detailed 3-D walk through displays and descriptions of Saba plant life that can be referenced online world-wide.

CI and the DCNA are now working to attract funding and staff to a survey of insect life on Saba. They hope it will take place in 2008 and provide another priceless online resource

'We'd like to carry out a detailed botanical survey on St Eustatius next,' says Michael.

'Then we'd like to move through the other islands of the Dutch Caribbean until we've assembled an online 'virtual museum' of natural history in the region which will be accessible via a computer screen to tourists, walkers and scuba divers as well as scientists.

'Just as importantly, we're aiming give local institutions and people the data they need to empower them to launch their own initiatives to protect and conserve their own environment and wildlife. 'With partners like the DCNA, we're confident that this can be achieved soon.'

[photo: CI's Mike Smith and Saba Bank]

Funding a sustainable future

DCNA faces the dual challenges of capitalizing a Trust Fund, whilst ensuring that the protected areas continue to be managed at an optimized level and funding essential project work. Here's how it's done ...

Dutch Ministry

Grant funding from the Dutch Ministry of the Interior, which was approved in November 2006 is essential to DCNA. Primarily the moneys go towards establishing a conservation Trust Fund. Of the one million Euro made available annually by the Dutch Ministry, Euro 750,000 is passed to the Parks as "operational support" and the parks make an equivalent donation into the Trust Fund. The goal is that once the Trust Fund is fully capitalized, the revenues from that fund will be used to pay the annual running costs for all ten Parks in the Dutch Caribbean thereby securing for them a sustainable funding future.

The rest of the funding from the Dutch Ministry is used to support the operational management of the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance and fund its secretariat, projects as well as direct support to the neediest parks.

Stichting DOEN

A funding proposal to Stichting DOEN hopes to raise sufficient funds for the parks of the Windward islands to ensure continuity for the coming three years. If approved the grant would guarantee an educational programme for local schools on all three islands as well as providing money to develop management plans and

essential outreach and educational tools.

Dutch Postcode Lottery

The Dutch Postcode Lottery has been extremely generous towards DCNA since its inception providing over Euro 2.4 million in start up funding and project money to support the Dutch Caribbean Parks. DCNA is now pushing the envelop by petitioning the Lottery to accept DCNA as one of its beneficiary. This is no trivial step for the Lottery as they provide institutional funding support to each of their beneficiaries on an annual basis and they are inundated with hopeful applicants every year. If they were to accept DCNA, this

would not only ensure a future for all ten parks of the Dutch Caribbean until the Trust Fund is fully capitalized, but it would then allow DCNA to focus on it's biggest fundraising challenge of all: raising money to capitalize the Trust Fund

Prince Bernhard Fund

The Prince Bernhard Nature Fund has always been there for the Dutch Caribbean parks, providing them with small grant funds for projects, to support the purchase of essential equipment and funding their research projects. In 2007 they again approved a project, this time helping DCNA and the Parks to develop a series of Guide

Books. Starting with St Eustatius and Bonaire the aim is to produce Guide Books for all ten parks. These will include not only visitor information on the trails and dives, plants and animals in the parks, but also insights into the conservation and management practices in place to protect them.

Corporate Support

DCNA thanks the following individuals and businesses for their continued support of DCNA. Thank you to:

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Working together: the way ahead



Bridge-building was the name of the game at the board meeting of the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance in May. And board vice chair Leendert van Driel believes many crucial bridges were built. It was the first time that representatives of major conservation organisations in the Netherlands had sat down ace-to-face with their counterparts from the six islands of the Dutch Caribbean.

'They had made the effort to fly out to Bonaire to join our Board meeting and I think they were impressed by what they saw,' says Leendert. 'They probably arrived with both good and bad ideas of how business is done on the other side of the ocean. I believe they went away with a new view of how professional nature conservation has become in the Dutch

Caribbean. 'Just as importantly, the atmosphere was warm and relaxed and a lot of close personal relationships were formed. That bodes well for the future.'

Leendert is sure that those new relationships will be critical in the biggest and hardest task facing the DCNA over the next ten years – building a 20 - 25 million euro trust fund to generate enough interest to support one marine and one terrestrial protected area on each of the six islands.

'Our Dutch partners will be a major help in encouraging other institutions and parties to provide capital for the trust fund,' he says.

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