

ESTABLISHING A REGIONAL CONTACT NETWORK FOR FOREST RESTORATION FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

*Janice Kerby*¹

The second objective of the workshop was to consider whether to establish a regional contact network of practitioners and scientists involved in forest restoration for wildlife conservation. Janice Kerby proposed a series of issues to be addressed (listed in the appendix). These issues were initially considered in the small discussion groups, then consensus was sought from the whole assembly. The principal questions raised were as follows:

Is a network necessary?

As the workshop progressed and the interchange of ideas and experiences among participants from different countries developed, the need for more formal networking became clear. In several cases, new and constructive contacts were made between researchers working on very similar subjects, who had not previously been aware of each other. Participants identified the following reasons for establishing a network:

1. Concerns were expressed that, with the current lack of co-ordination the risk of “reinventing the wheel” and thus wasting scarce financial and human resources was high. Conversely, important areas of research may be neglected because it is assumed that someone else is already undertaking that work. Deficiencies in current systems of disseminating research results and transferring knowledge and expertise were identified as follows:
 - a) The time lag between completion of research and publication of results is often considerable.
 - b) Many researchers are too busy to commit the substantial time needed to prepare a paper for publication.
 - c) Many journals are prohibitively expensive and consequently not accessible to researchers in developing countries.
 - d) Reports or technical documents produced in the language of one country in the region will not be readable in most other countries.
 - e) International workshops on relevant subjects are often expensive and if the proceedings are not published, there is no further dissemination outside the elite group of attendees.

¹ Forest Restoration Research Unit, Biology Department, Faculty of Science, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, 50200, Thailand.

2. The need for a unified voice to promote forest restoration for wildlife conservation:
 - a) To governments, to engender increased political support.
 - b) To funding organisations, to draw attention to areas of essential research, and to ensure parity with the other forestry sectors
3. To strengthen and promote forest restoration research in the tropics, as there is currently a bias towards research on forest restoration in temperate countries.

Could existing networks serve this purpose?

The current status of existing networks was discussed, several were identified as being of interest to researchers in this field, but with the following limitations;

- a) The Asia Pacific Association of Forestry Research Institutions (APAFRI), has an informal network, and a fundamental objective of its “Treelink” project (funded by CIDA) is to disseminate results, but this is currently at an early stage of development.
- b) The International Union of Forestry Research Organisations (IUFRO) has an informal network and wide-ranging access to information, but it is often dominated by commercial forestry interests and there is no clear route for rapid dissemination of information relevant to this subject.
- c) The International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) could support this type of research and would possibly support a network, but is established to facilitate implementation of projects rather than to run them.
- d) The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) works extensively in general forestry issues, both with regard to policy and research. Under the aegis of FAO, the Forestry Research Support Programme for Asia and the Pacific (FORSPA) has been running a Network on Forestry Information Services in Asia-Pacific, which is intended to be subsumed by Treelink when that becomes established. This network has access to a wide range of sources but restoration for wildlife is not a priority.
- e) The Forestry Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) and the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) are supporting some relevant work. The latter has an informal network for contacts among researchers via its web page covering all aspects of forestry.
- f) The Regional Community Forestry Training Centre (RECOFTC) and the International Centre for Research in Agro-forestry (ICRAF) have existing informal networks, but restoration for wildlife is not a priority.

Thus it was concluded that in their current forms, none of the above can provide the services and support that would be needed for the type of network to which the participants aspired.

Who should be involved and how could such a network be organised?

All of the discussion groups felt that a new network should be formed and there was considerable enthusiasm for its rapid establishment. Two options were proposed initially:

Option 1 – set up the network as a sub-working group of IUFRO specifically for South East Asia, utilising the existing contacts and structure, and undertaking a more proactive role in networking and circulation of information. One of the discussion groups favoured this option.

Option 2 – benefit from existing networks such as APAFRI, FAO, CIFOR and IUFRO for information and contacts, but co-ordinate a specific network through a paid central co-ordinator based in FORRU, who could liaise with voluntary representatives in the other countries. Two of the discussion groups initially expressed a preference for this option.

John Parrotta contributed a short presentation on the structure of IUFRO, which aims to promote international co-operation in forest research and related sciences. IUFRO seeks to strengthen linkages between forestry researchers and to aid in dissemination of results. The organisation is composed of 8 divisions, the principal one of relevance to this workshop being “Division 1 – Silviculture”. Each division has a key contact person and runs several meetings each year. There are 681 member organisations from 106 countries. IUFRO does not have funding to directly support research costs, but contributes to relevant workshops and meetings where possible, the average number of meetings for the last 5 years has been 70. Within each of the divisions, several units or working groups pursue particular areas of research. David Lamb, the current co-ordinator for the working group on “Rehabilitation of degraded and secondary tropical forests” (1.17.03), offered to adapt the existing system to accommodate the needs of this network. The contact list derived from this workshop could form the basis of the network. It was emphasised that many people must be prepared to contribute material to make such a system actually function and that the network needs to be small and creative not large and bureaucratic. An informal ballot was taken and Option 1 was carried by majority.

How would the network function?

There was a consensus that the network should be tested for effectiveness and commitment for 1 year then reviewed and the future status decided. A first step would be to identify relevant experts in various disciplines to feed information to the central co-ordinator. Masakazu Kashio pointed out that there was a need for translation of documents, as they would not be accessible to many (particularly junior) researchers if they were circulated in English. Thus it would be necessary to have voluntary in-country representatives to help with translation and editing of documents. The central co-ordinator would need to allocate these tasks accordingly.

Steve Elliott proposed that a web-site could be linked to the existing IUFRO web page that would facilitate access to papers and the results of discussion groups and workshops. In addition Janice Kerby proposed that there should be a database of contacts, research

interests and current research projects, and a means for fast dissemination of summarised research results (without compromising publication rights) such as technical notes and a newsletter. Where members do not have access to e-mail or the Internet, there would need to be in-country peripheral linkages by land-mail.

The Requirement for Funding and Local Representatives

Three views on the need for funding emerged from the discussion groups:

Option 1 – that the person is more important than money, and the co-ordination can be undertaken voluntarily, as is currently done in IUFRO.

Option 2. – that it is necessary to apply to external funding bodies for a grant for the co-ordinator post. The co-ordinator could seek funding for ongoing costs, workshops and special training events, possibly approaching ITTO, IUFRO, CIFOR, EU etc. Apichart Kaosa-Ard said that in his experience of running the Teak Network, it was necessary to have membership fees to support the costs of the administration.

Option 3 – that the co-ordinator could approach APAFRI to see if the network can be linked to the Treelink programme, which has some similar aims, and thus receive suitable funding.

There was a consensus that if David Lamb were to take on the role of co-ordinating the network through the existing IUFRO working group structure, then at this stage there may be no need to apply for funding. When the network is reviewed after one year, this will be one of the issues to reconsider.

Billy Hau expressed concern that the momentum of this workshop would be lost if no decisions were made immediately on who would be actively involved in feeding information to David Lamb. Billy then offered his services as a voluntary contact for China. Sein Maung Wint from Myanmar observed that although he was a representative of an NGO rather than Government, he could co-operate in information provision. Ulfah Siregar and Yadi Setiadi offered their help with circulating information on Indonesian forest research, and with liaison with CIFOR and IUFRO respectively.

Bharat Lal observed that there is a great diversity of ecosystems covered by the countries in the region, but in India there has been more than 25 years of forest restoration which can contribute to research in many of those ecosystems. In his role in government Bharat has access to a wide range of forest research information and will help in this way. Steve Elliott offered to feed information from FORRU into the network, and Laura Johnson offered her help in liaising with APAFRI through the Treelink Project.

Conclusion

The participants of this workshop identified the need for a regional network specifically for forest restoration for wildlife conservation. Such a network would facilitate the rapid transfer of knowledge and expertise among members and countries, and would

prevent duplication of research. In addition, the combined voices of the network members could more effectively advocate the importance of this work and help in securing political and financial resources. During the 12-month trial period it would be necessary for the other questions raised in the appendix to be given due consideration.

Appendix - Considerations for Establishing a Regional Contact Network for Forest Restoration

What would be the aims and objectives of such a network?

Is a new network necessary? Are there other networks that could serve this purpose?
How would the aims and objectives be decided?
How would they be updated and amended and by whom?

Who would be involved?

Only countries in the region? Colleagues from other regions with relevant expertise?
Formal/informal network?
1 central co-ordinator or representatives from each country, who takes responsibility?
How to decide who should be the co-ordinator or representatives?

What would a regional database of contacts involve?

Contact details? Research interests? Current research projects?
Who would update this and how often? Is it the responsibility of all to do this?
Recommended references?

Sharing information?

How can research results be shared without affecting publication status?
Would members be prepared to produce interim technical notes?
Could there be a “library” of relevant papers, notes, information sheets?
How would this be managed/updated/circulated?
Links with researchers/practitioners in other regions?
Would members share information on fundraising for research?

Communicate how ?

E-mail? What proportion of members have access?
Web-page, same access considerations?
By normal mail? Meetings/workshops? Newsletter?
Whose responsibility is it to produce and update the above?

Funding of the network?

What would be necessary? Who would raise it and manage it?
How could costs be minimised? From where?

Janice Kerby