



**BIOSPHERE  
EXPEDITIONS.ORG**  
celebrating 10 years of conservation 1999 - 2009

# ANNIVERSARY MAGAZINE



**WELCOME!**



I am really glad to be able to welcome you to our 10 year anniversary magazine and hope that you will enjoy it. We do not normally produce a printed magazine, but we feel that this year is a bit special and so we have decided to mark the event with this publication. Biosphere Expeditions is all about conservation and inside you will find a range of articles on conservation from all angles; from scientists, team members and expedition leaders, plus a lot about what Biosphere Expeditions and the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions have achieved together over the last 10 years. The successes of the Biosphere clan are a function of us all working together, by doing, empowering and inspiring both ourselves and others. I hope you enjoy the read.

Kathy Wilden  
Director of Biosphere Expeditions



I am very proud to be welcoming you to this 10 year anniversary magazine on behalf of the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions. I have been the President since the inception of the organisation and I am very pleased to see some of the major successes over the 5 year period highlighted here. It is also rather a nice coincidence that I have celebrated my 10th expedition with Biosphere in 2009, so for me it is a double celebration. I hope that you enjoy the magazine and maybe I'll bump into you out on expedition soon.

All the best

Martyn Roberts  
President of the Friends of Biosphere Expeditions

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#### EDITORIAL

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Dr. Matthias Hammer, Founder and Managing Director of Biosphere Expeditions is celebrating the organisations' 10 year achievements, but his radar is set in the next decade.

How did it all start, and what does the future hold for the award-winning organisation?

## FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH: ABOUT THE PAST AND FUTURE OF BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS

The best ideas often happen in the oddest of places and the concept for Biosphere Expeditions came about in the shower.

Matthias Hammer, then studying for his PhD at Cambridge, was taking a shower after a rowing outing when the idea hit him. He knew academia was not for him with its mantra of 'publish or perish' and a friend had suggested he should charge people to go on expeditions with him.

So with that thought, Biosphere Expeditions was born. He then looked at where to set up his non-profit organisation

and quickly discovered the UK offered a lot more pragmatism than his native Germany. Matthias had no knowledge of how to run a business, so signed up for several courses. He was in the process of writing a business plan to present to the banks when an acquaintance called him out of the blue, saying he had heard what he was up to and would he like an interest-free loan?! The rest is, as they say, history.

The success of Biosphere Expeditions has been in bringing together two distinct groups; field scientists with important projects in need of funding and practical help, and people who are keen to do something to help our planet and wildlife during their holiday time. The bringing together is the critical aspect, and for that, Matthias spotlights the expedition leaders and office staff that Biosphere Expeditions has worldwide. These staff work to make sure that people know that there is the opportunity to do this sort of thing in their holiday time, something that takes the skills of marketing and PR people, and then the expedition leaders provide all of the on-the-ground support to ensure that the science gets done and that everyone is happy.

While initially Matthias Hammer used his academic contacts to find suitable projects to support, now the offers come flooding in – over 100 a year. New for 2010 are projects looking at lynx and wolf numbers in Slovakia, the first ever project in Australia looking at the iconic flatback turtles, and a new large cat conservation expedition in Namibia.

“One of the earliest successes for Biosphere Expeditions was a project in Poland that helped prevent a wolf cull. There had been an argument between conservationists and the hunting lobby. As an independent body we conducted research, which showed there were not many wolves around – result; no hunting licenses were offered.”

When asked about the hardest challenge of the past 10 years, or how his vision has changed, he says that animals usually co-operate, but sometimes humans don't, so some of the biggest challenges were connected with overcoming

### Don't just take our word for it...

Biosphere Expeditions has won a number of **awards and accolades** over the past 10 years, including

- ◆ **Best Volunteering Organisation**  
(Responsible Tourism, international award scheme based in the UK)
- ◆ **Best Holiday for Green-Minded Travellers**  
(The Independent on Sunday, UK newspaper)
- ◆ **Ten Best Wildlife Volunteering Holidays**  
(The Guardian, UK newspaper)
- ◆ **Best New Trips**  
(National Geographic Adventure, USA magazine)
- ◆ **Top Ten Conservation Holiday**  
(BBC Wildlife, UK magazine)
- ◆ **Conservation Award**  
(EOG Association for Conservation, European award scheme)
- ◆ **Best for Protection of Endangered Species**  
(Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards, international award scheme based in the UK)
- ◆ **Unforgettable Travel Adventures**  
(Merian, German travel book publisher)
- ◆ **Best Save-the-Earth Trip**  
(Travel + Leisure, USA magazine)
- ◆ **Top Holiday for Nature**  
(P.M., German magazine)



Matthias Hammer on the lookout for new projects.  
Here in Yosemite National Park in the USA.

logistical problems, prejudices and people trying to make things difficult, for whatever reason. Again, Matthias feels it is because of the excellent Biosphere Expeditions staff that these challenges are overcome in the field and that real science is undertaken despite the obstacles.

Matthias is a great supporter of responsible tourism and strongly believes the argument that people should not fly is ludicrous. Tourism brings so many benefits to so many parts of the world that would suffer without it. He commented, "as long as there are people prepared to pay to visit the rainforest or look at big game, then the loggers and hunters will be kept at bay."

Today, Matthias has all the passion and drive he did ten years ago and can still be found personally leading expeditions where he continues making a difference to people's lives and the survival of animals. When asked about the challenges and plans for the next decade of Biosphere Expeditions, he doesn't want it to become a big organisation that loses touch with people on the ground. "As long as my right hand still knows what my left hand is doing, we're doing fine. I am not sure where the point is when this will no longer be the case, so there is scope for growth yet", he adds. "But in the end I prefer to do a few projects and do them well."

"Having said all that, there is always more that can and needs to be done in conservation. With the team that we have within Biosphere Expeditions, the team members and scientists, the local people and all our supporters, Biosphere Expeditions is now well placed to undertake more and more. With the achievements that we already have under our belt, we have a very firm base to grow from with strong credibility and great support and my aim is to grow into an even stronger conservation organisation with continued best practice in voluntourism." ■



## TOP TEN ACHIEVEMENTS 1999-2009

\* Project work has resulted in fewer lions, leopards and cheetahs being killed by farmers in **NAMIBIA**. **1**

\* Helped to get an area of the **UKRAINE** declared a national park thereby protecting a unique steppe area, which is a stop off point for many migratory birds, as well as a haven for wolves and home to Europe's biggest orchid field. **2**

\* Declaration of a protected area in the **ALTAI** Republic in Central Asia, which provides habitat for endangered species including the magnificent snow leopard. **3**

\* Played an active role in saving 50 wolves from being declared legitimate hunting targets in the Bieszczady mountains in **POLAND**. This was achieved by providing accurate information about predator numbers and influencing local authorities to reverse their decision to cull wolves. **4**

\* Recommendations on new guidelines for boat behaviour in the Amazon basin have been incorporated into conservation plans. These are needed because boat activity disturbs animal activity in the area and greatly contributes to the threat to the natural habitat of the **PERU**vian Amazon Rainforest. **5**

\* Recommendations for the management and protection of jaguars have been incorporated into national and state-wide jaguar action plans for **BRAZIL**'s Atlantic rainforest. **6**

\* Recommendations for the management and protection of the coral reefs of the Cayos Cochinos marine protected area of **HONDURAS** have been incorporated into the managing authority's action plan. **7**

\* Together with partners in **SPAIN** we helped reverse an EU high altitude carcass removal regulation, which was designed to stop the spread of BSE, but was actually starving high altitude vultures and bears. **8**

\* We have trained more than 50 local staff and rangers and involved communities **WORLDWIDE**, creating livelihoods and non-destructive sustainable jobs. **9**

\* We have raised the awareness of environmental issues of literally tens of thousands of people and created lasting **INTERNATIONAL** friendships and partnerships. **10**

Tessa McGregor, a wildlife biologist, environmental journalist and big cat expert talks about the predators and their battle for survival across the globe. Tessa has led expeditions for Biosphere Expeditions in the Altai Republic in Central Asia in search of the elusive snow leopard and in Oman, studying the Arabian leopard.

Of all the big cats, none are more symbolic of wilderness and rareness than snow leopards. They capture the public imagination as do the high mountains of Asia they inhabit. Yet they have only been studied scientifically since the 1980s. It was thought back then, that the challenge of studying such a rare creature in such difficult terrain would prove insurmountable. But George Schaller and then Rodney Jackson showed it was possible and blazed the way for Tom McCarthy's study that followed in Mongolia and the Snow Leopard Conservancy and International Snow Leopard Trust were born. Research continues and expands into more and more areas of the snow leopard's extensive, high altitude range. This work has revealed the snow leopard's world to us and shed light on the behaviour and needs of this beautiful creature. In the Altai mountains of Siberia, on the border with Mongolia, work particularly close to my heart continues.

Much rarer than the snow leopard and equally challenging to study is the Arabian leopard. Its small remaining numbers cling on precariously in the mountains of Oman and

Yemen; but the population is so small and the threats it faces so great that assuring its future on the Arabian Peninsula is one of the most difficult felid conservation challenges. This is one of the reasons why Biosphere Expeditions set up an expedition in Oman, in collaboration with the Office for the Advisor of Conservation, Diwan of Royal Court. This expedition assists local scientists in ascertaining the status of the Arabian leopard in the remote and mountainous Dhofar region. It searches for leopard signs and attempts to camera-trap the animals in important leopard habitat. Its other aim is to complete a wildlife inventory of the area, strengthen ties with local people and investigate historical records of leopard presence. Biosphere Expeditions is collaborating with conservation authorities in Oman to assist in removing this gap in knowledge to help conserve the Arabian leopard.

Another species I have worked with for many years is the tiger. Their plight is well known. This greatest felid icon species is facing extinction in its natural habitat. Campaigns to save



*Tessa McGregor and Hadi Hikmani collecting an Arabian leopard exhibit from Khasab museum, Musandam*

## BIG CATS IN TROUBLE:

*Arabian leopard*





*Biosphere Expedition team surveying in Oman*

the tiger have been high profile, but despite money and publicity, huge problems remain. Habitat fragmentation, inbreeding and poaching are all part of the problem; but the long-term survival of tigers, like all big cats, depends on

people. What do we know of the people who live close to them? The very people who, until recently, were often left out of the conservation equation. What part do they play in research? High-tech study methods have shed light on many aspects of tiger behaviour, but so much is left to discover. Tiger population estimates (crucial for the implementation of wildlife management plans) are still based on age-old tracking methods. Tigers need space, lots of it, in order to maintain a genetically viable population. That space, already in short supply, is shrinking.

100 years ago, eight subspecies of tiger walked the Earth from Turkey to Turkmenistan, Siberia to Sumatra. There were over 100,000 tigers on the Indian subcontinent alone. Now

fewer than 3,000 remain in the wild, worldwide. Extinction has already claimed the Balinese, Caspian and the Javan tiger. Which one will be next? Is there any hope for any of them? The Siberian tiger has one of the largest remaining populations, but the most recent survey shows that even this once stable population is now declining at an alarming rate. The tiger's fate seems a fitting allegory for the problems facing all big cats.



*Sundarban tiger caught on camera trap*

Sadly, big cats are in trouble all over the world. Ironically the more we learn about them and understand them, the faster we seem to chart their decline. These magnificent predators need space to live, breed, hunt their wild prey and disperse. That space is declining globally. Big cats are highly vulnerable to human impacts. Large animals tend to be slow to reproduce and, owing to the inefficiencies of energy conversion through the food chain, predators are often rare. To compound the problem, most large carnivores compete with humans for both prey and habitat. They can pose a direct threat to livestock and in some cases, human life. They are frequently exploited commercially for their fur (both legally and illegally) and bones. Consequently, big cats are especially vulnerable to extinction and have higher

## IS THERE HOPE?



© Gertrud Denzau



*Snow leopard*

extinction rates than other large carnivores. Still, the fundamental role of large predators in the dynamics of ecosystems is increasingly well recognised. In combination with a shift in attitudes towards predators over recent decades, this

knowledge has prompted attempts to conserve and restore predator communities in many areas where they have become altered by human activities. Biosphere Expeditions has worked successfully in the Caprivi delta in Namibia, conducting investigations into the ecology of human-predator conflict and contributing to the development of rural livelihood strategies that will promote coexistence between people and predators, and will be implemented on a national scale.

Globally to locally, wild cat conservation is a challenge. From Scotland to Siberia wild cats face surprisingly similar problems. The Scottish wildcat, the only indigenous remaining wild felid in the UK and possibly the UK's rarest mammal is facing extinction. To combat this, the Cairngorms Wildcat Project was formed in May 2009 to safeguard surviving wildcat populations and create favourable conditions for the species to thrive in the Cairngorms National Park and beyond in the future. The lynx was not so fortunate and became extinct in Britain in the late Middle Ages. Large-scale deforestation is thought to have been a major factor, but Scotland now has over 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> of suitable lynx habitat. Based on the availability of prey resources, Scotland could support around 400 adult and sub-adult lynx in the Highlands and around 50 in the Southern Uplands.

A Scottish population of this size would be the fourth largest lynx population in Europe based on current population estimates; but reintroduction is a contentious issue, especially where large carnivores are concerned. Big cats are treated as deities in some countries, as vermin in others; but wherever they are found they evoke passionate feelings.

The outcome of carnivore reintroductions is often difficult to assess, owing to unclear objectives and poor monitoring; however, in the most thorough analysis of outcomes, substantially fewer than half of all projects were determined to have been successful. Of the three carnivore families for which reintroduction attempts have been most frequent, felids have the lowest success rate. This is problematic, as reintroduction programmes are usually expensive and labour-intensive. Determining the reasons for success or failure, and developing policies for good practice are important goals for conservation biologists. Public support and community education are crucial factors for successful reintroduction. Evidence suggests that even within a given area, attitudes to different carnivore species may vary markedly, whilst different historical or cultural associations may impact strongly on attitudes towards certain carnivore species.

Reintroduction is about much more than bringing a species back. It is about bringing it back to a habitat where it can survive. Ultimately it is about re-wilding. Exciting and worthwhile as this is, how much more urgent is the need to stop 'de-wilding' and losing species in the first place. That is the real challenge. For that, we need to understand how closely we are all linked and how our actions affect habitats and species worldwide, not just on our doorstep. Big cats act like barometers for the well-being of the environment they inhabit. We owe it to them to keep the pressure up and assure their survival. ■

*Tessa McGregor with locals in the Altai mountains*



© Benjamin Fabian





Converted fishermen's cottages at les Ecrehous reef, Jersey

Spider crab and lobster. Two staples of the Jersey fishing industry



The European lobster (*Homarus gammarus*)

# A VERY FISHY TALE

From Caribbean coral to Jersey lobster, Jon Shrives outlines his work in the marine world.

Another icy wave breaks over our heads. I gun the engine of the little boat, cresting another wave. We speed on through the blinding spray. In the distance is the blur of a fishing trawler hauling in her nets. Timing is everything. I have to move our little fisheries RIB alongside at just the right time. If my timing is off, we could hit the winter driven waves side on. My boarding officer could be swept away, or worse, we could get caught in the fishing boat's gear, and dragged underwater. Time is money to a fishing boat, and although we represent the long (and now rather damp) arm of the law out here, we need to get aboard the vessel with the minimum of fuss and inconvenience to the trawler's crew. As my heart pounds and my fingers go numb from the cold, you may be wondering how, or why, as a coral reef biologist and former expedition leader for Biosphere Expeditions, I ended up

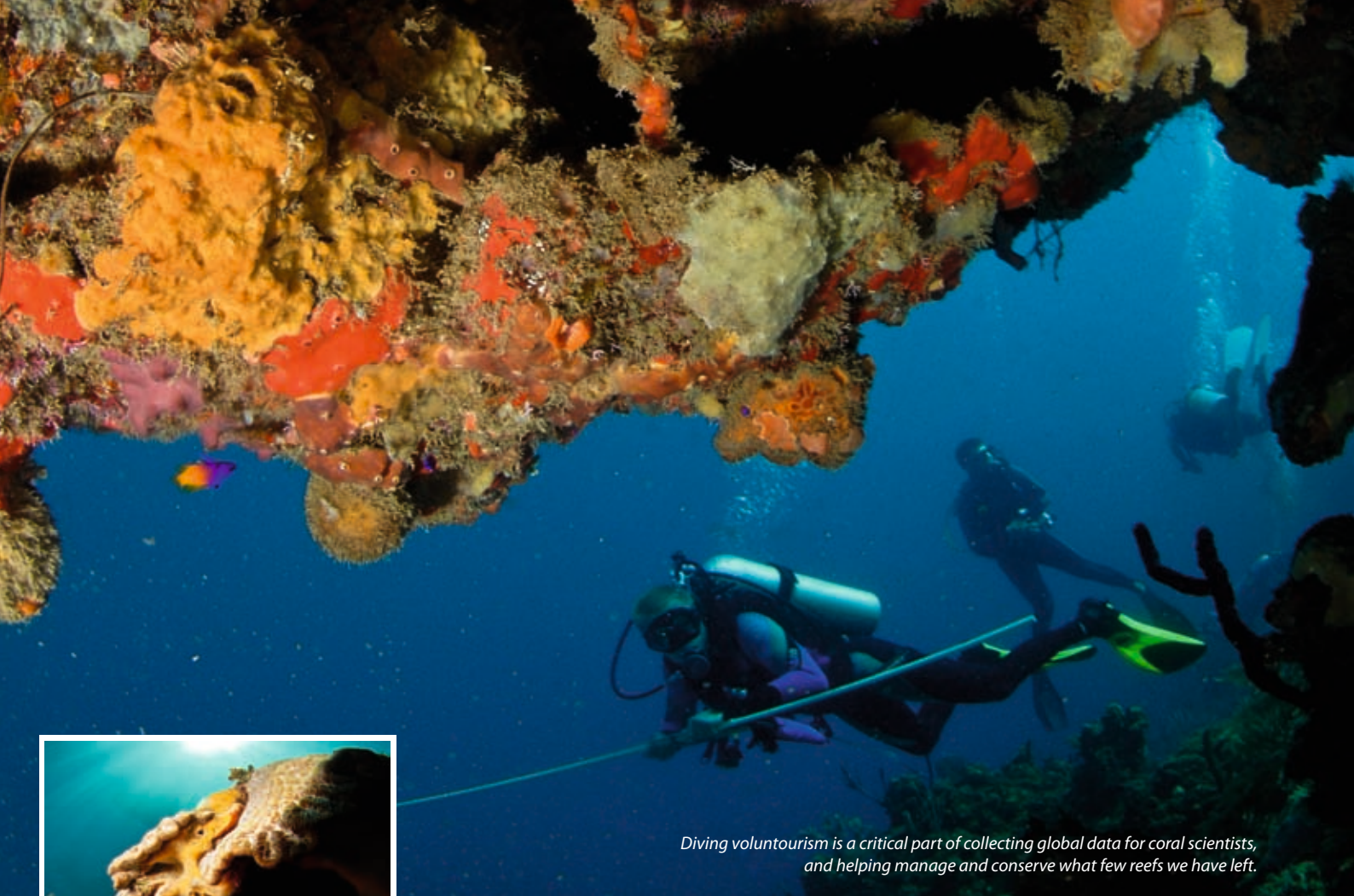
shivering in the English Channel in these winter gales. Well believe it or not, I love every minute of it, and there is a direct link to what I do now as a Fisheries Research Officer and what I did 12 months ago in Los Cayos Cochinos, Honduras.



It all started innocently enough. Rather than just go on another diving holiday, I thought why not visit somewhere where few get to go, and do something with my trip. After 14 weeks of volunteering in Indonesia, my life was changed forever. I had worked alongside scientists and locals alike and seen my efforts turned into tangible results. I loved collecting data underwater and became addicted to diving science. I studied hard, became a PADI Divemaster and then begged for a job back in Indonesia the following year. Whilst there, I worked on a wide array of projects. I started off carrying tanks and eventually got the chance to run some of the research projects myself. I will never forget some of the Reef Check surveys I participated in. Some of the atoll reefs we dove on were uncharted and brought a whole new meaning to the term 'pristine'. Thousands upon thousands of different coloured fish, effortlessly weaving their way in and out of the intricate coral towers. It was like something from a science fiction, alien cityscape. Fish traffic at rush hour. On another project we conducted some of the first



Jersey Fisheries Officers boarding a French Trawler



*Diving voluntourism is a critical part of collecting global data for coral scientists, and helping manage and conserve what few reefs we have left.*

hydrophone recordings of spotted dolphins in Indonesia. Not only did volunteering on these projects provide scientific data for the management of the Wakatobi Marine Protected Area, it also provided an alternative source of income for the local Indonesian fishermen. In Indonesia much of the country's main source of protein is reef fish. As such, much

of the pressure on coral reefs came from destructive fishing practices such as blast fishing, or cyanide fishing. Money and support from volunteers were invested in projects such as "Rompongs". These bamboo structures were moored off the reef and attracted in large, deep water fish, which fishermen could harvest sustainably with hand lines. Volunteers were also housed in community-owned and run properties – so money went back directly into the community. Fishermen and their families changed occupations to fill the need for boat drivers, mechanics cooks and guides.

From Indonesia I went on to start a PhD in coral reef ecology. This time my studies took me to the Caribbean coast of Honduras and the palm tree islands of Los Cayos Cochinos. Here I took on a dual role. I started a four year investigation on the impact of river sediment and run-off upon the island's reefs, and became the local head scientist for Operation Wallacea. In this role I supported and ran several research projects, with up to 30 staff and 100 volunteers. I had to learn Spanish pretty quick! But again a rewarding project, where volunteer contributions helped take fishing pressure off the reef and helped scientists collect data for both management and publication. The project required coordinating scientists and volunteers from a variety of different backgrounds and nationalities. If you're reading this article, there's a good chance that you've already been on an expedition, and, like me, learnt one of the most important things about expeditions: you must have a sense of humour! What can go wrong, will go wrong, but it doesn't mean you can't have a lot of fun fixing it!

My involvement in research projects in Honduras for six years led me to Biosphere Expeditions' door and greater involvement



*A Queen angelfish (Holacanthus ciliaris) darts for cover amongst corals and sponges*

*Expedition team members collecting data on the reefs of Los Cayos Cochinos, Honduras*





*Pacific oyster (Crassostrea gigas) beds in the Royal Bay of Grouville, Jersey*



with Reef Check. Reef Check is an international non-government organisation that has developed a universal method for divers to work alongside scientists in collecting data

on reef health. This is ideal for expeditions, where divers with no scientific background can provide invaluable assistance in collecting data on a host of fish, coral and invertebrate species. Not only are expedition participants providing data for conservation and management at the local level, but Reef Check can also compile the data we send for regional and even global comparisons of reef health. I also feel that another important bonus of expeditions is that they act as a great catalyst for international collaboration. Too often these days, scientists find themselves in fierce competition for funding and thus exclusivity in an area of research. I won't get into the boring details of academic funding cycles, but suffice it to say, the support from volunteer-led projects and expedition NGOs such as Biosphere Expeditions allow scientists to cooperate rather than compete. This can be vitally important in allowing conservation to act and react quickly to saving regions under threat. A project involving scientists and volunteers can be put together in months, whereas waiting for funding from a research council can take years.

A recent example is the 2008 Biosphere Expeditions reconnaissance survey in Musandam. This project brought together scientists from Germany, UK, USA, Portugal, UAE, Belgium, Oman and even Jersey (yes, that's me!). The remote desert fjords of Musandam are becoming increasingly popular with tourists, and there is a real and urgent need to get baseline data on the health of the unstudied local coral reefs. Even as I write this, an expedition is out in Musandam collecting data to safeguard the future of this incredible and unusual habitat. The data collected by the team will feed directly into establishing marine protected areas.

So how does this all feed into my frozen adventure in the tumultuous winter seas of the English Channel? Well, the skills, contacts and experience I picked up as a volunteer, then scientist, then expedition leader, all directly feed into my current job. As a Fisheries Officer for the States of Jersey Environment Department, I have a split role between science and enforcement. The work includes studying the populations and ecology of fish, lobsters, scallops, whelks, abalone and their respective habitats. As an enforcement officer, I liaise with scientists, civil servants, politicians and fishermen in Jersey, France and the UK. One day I can be writing briefing papers for politicians, the next I could be interviewed by the media about an environmental topic or out at sea conducting patrols and boardings. My experience of working with a wide variety of people from different backgrounds has put me in good stead for working with stake-

holders and the public on consultation and management. Cooperating with international scientists on research projects has also paid dividends. We are currently cooperating with a colleague from the University of Hawaii on an exciting acoustic tagging project. We tag wrasse and rays in a small bay in Jersey, using the same equipment and methods they used on coral reefs in the Pacific!

So you see, I really have all you lot to blame! Well, actually, you lot to thank! Without the help and support of countless volunteers and team members over the years, I never would have gotten this far. Much of the data I collected, I collected alongside the likes of you, and it has gone on not just to make a difference in Honduras and Indonesia, but now here in Jersey too!

Now as I prepare myself for another patrol tomorrow and another battering by the sea, I must remember that important lesson I learnt from all those expeditions... what was it again? Ah, yes, remember to have a sense of humour! ■

*Another day in the office!  
The Fisheries RIB launches through the stern  
of the Fisheries Patrol Vessel, Norman le Brocq*



# EXPEDITIONS & PROJECTS WORLDWIDE



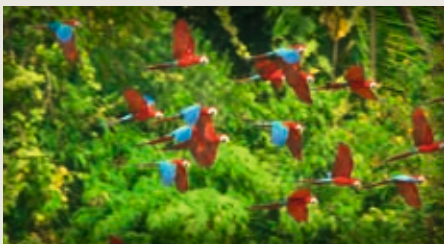
Fascinating creatures of the deep: Studying whales, dolphins and turtles around the Azores archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean.

## AZORES



Diving in a Caribbean paradise: Safeguarding the coral reefs of Cayos Cochinos, Honduras.

## HONDURAS



Icons of the Amazon: Jaguars, pumas, parrots and peccaries in Peru.

## PERU

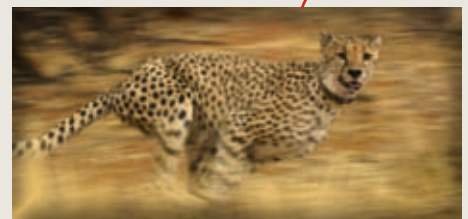
Lost world: Studying jaguars, pumas and their prey in Brazil's Atlantic rainforest.

## BRAZIL



Big cat conundrum: The challenge of protecting leopards, cheetahs and caracals in the Khomas Hochland of central Namibia.

## NAMIBIA



UK

TASTER DAY:  
Broads National Park

TASTER DAY:  
New Forest National Park



SCHNUPPERTAG:  
Nationalpark Berchtesgaden

SCHNUPPERTAG:  
Nationalpark Eifel

SCHNUPPERTAG:  
Nationalpark Unteres Odertal

## GERMANY



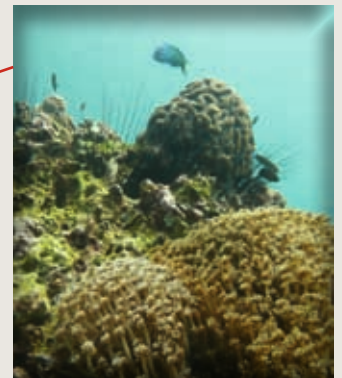
**SLOVAKIA** White wilderness:  
Winter wolf and lynx tracking  
in the Tatra mountains of Slovakia.



**ALTAI** Mountain ghosts: Snow leopards  
and other animals in the mountains of  
the Altai Republic, Central Asia.

Underwater pioneers: studying &  
protecting the unique coral reefs of  
the Musandam  
peninsula within  
Oman & UAE.

## MUSANDAM



**OMAN** The elusive and unknown cat:  
Arabian leopard in the desert mountains  
of Dhofar, Oman.

Beach combing for conservation:  
monitoring  
flatback turtles  
along the stunning coastline of  
Western Australia.

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA



## AUSTRALIA

TASTER DAY:  
Melbourne

TASTER DAY:  
Sydney





*Wetland in the Caprivi delta of Namibia.*

# FROM THE WETLANDS OF CAPRIVI TO THE



*Meeting some megafauna in Namibia.*



**Kathy Wilden, Director of Biosphere Expeditions, shares her experience of staying in Caprivi, Namibia and also talks about a new project for the UK.**

The sound of cow bells being jangled quite close to my head wakes me from a very comfortable sleep - I am in a reed hut in southern Africa and the sound I am hearing is the warning bells on the wires that serve as a fence around our bush encampment – something is trying to get into our camp and it doesn't sound small.

*Boating over the fields of Caprivi.*



There are two wires running round the outside of the base camp, one at knee height and the other around head height. The wires are held up by large poles stuck into the ground - along the wires are strung old fashioned cow bells. The fence wasn't designed to keep animals out, but if one were to stray too close to camp we would be alerted by the jangling of the bells and the animal might also be put off entering. To my amazement this system is highly effective.

I am staying at the Caprivi base camp for a couple of weeks this year, mostly during the set-up of the expedition, and am lucky enough to occasionally be woken by the sound of the bells. Putting my head out of the hut I see a baby hippo wandering by and the paw prints of a large cat that had passed very close to my hut. The morning discussions over

tea around the campfire are always fascinating with rangers and scientists dissecting the animal calls heard the previous night. We have the fresh prints explained so we know exactly what had wandered by our encampment that night.

The area of Namibia we are working in this year is flooded by waters coming down from Angola. When I arrived from Tanzania the first thing I needed was a boat, which gives you a good idea of the severity of flooding.

The logistics of getting in and out of base camp are greatly affected by the water levels but for me it has added something rather magical to the experience. The road we previously used to get to the research areas is under water. The fields are also flooded and our boat has to motor across the tops of fences that run between the fields as we skirt the lines of trees whose tops stick out of the newly created wetland area.

It was rather strange to be floating over the ground in our sundowner safari boat, keeping one watchful eye out for hippos and crocodiles that may now frequent the area. It put me in mind of another expedition I have been working on to set up this year, which will be based in a landscape that very closely and surprisingly resembles the beautiful wetland area of the Caprivi expedition in Namibia.

I have been working on a new project in the Norfolk Broads in the UK. Have a look at the photos showing the two areas, they have distinct similarities at first glance. The animals, however, are really pretty different.



Norfolk wetland

Otter



Water vole



# NORFOLK BROADS



## Setting up our latest project

When setting up a new expedition, such as the one in Norfolk, there are key factors we need to have in place to ensure its success. We are usually approached by a scientist who would like help with the research they are doing and who needs extra funding and equipment to support their work.

Around 100 scientists a year get in touch and we then apply rigorous assessments to their proposals. The science is the most crucial point – they must be contributing to meaningful research that doesn't just sit on a shelf but supports action on the ground - see our 10 Year Top 10 Achievements article for the sorts of things our work has achieved. We then assess if it is logistically possible to take teams, feed them and house them, and consider if it is something people would like to do.

The Broads project is slightly different. Being just a few miles from our UK head office we have long been looking to do something here as the Norfolk Broads is an amazing wetland area with important conservation work being undertaken. Here we have worked very hard to bring scientists together around a couple of key animals in the area.

When planning expeditions we often talk about 'charismatic megafauna', a term that I, as a non-scientist, love to bandy about. It means literally the big (mega) animals (fauna) and refers to those animals which have the ability to inspire enthusiasm, interest, or affection, in others – on land that generally means big fluffy stuff and especially big cats, and in the marine environment it is the whales, dolphins and turtles that people find most empathy with. It is very



Kathy demonstrating a camera trap in the Norfolk Broads (Taster day 2009)

important that an expedition is working with one of these animals to capture people's imaginations and make them want to take part.

In Namibia we have five big predators (lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas and wild dogs) to fill this role but what do have in the Norfolk Broads? I am pleased to say we have the small but very wonderful and energetic water vole and the larger, adventurous otter as our flagship species here. They may not be quite so mega, but they are certainly wonderfully charismatic and we are looking forward to starting work to support them in the next year or two. ■





In January 2009 a group of twelve people aged between 24 and 69 from five different countries met for the first time in Oman to search for the Arabian leopard. Nobody expected that two weeks in the Oman desert would turn such diverse individuals into a tight-knit group of friends.

Nine months later eight of them reunited for the Biosphere Expeditions Caprivi expedition. Rasha Skybey from Australia reports.



## FROM OMAN TO NAMIBIA: A GREAT TEAM REUNITES IN CAPRIVI



**Oman team reunites in Caprivi:**

*Robert Burton (UK), Nicole Pastrick (Germany), Rasha Skybey (Australia), Axinja Munkel (Germany)  
Christian Schwenk (Germany), Khalid Hikmani (Oman), Roger Bunce (UK), Martyn Roberts (UK)  
Ronald Seipold, expedition leader (Germany)*

**M**y first expedition to Oman in January 2009 in search of the beautiful Arabian leopard proved that I could survive the great outdoors without a hair dryer and heels and still have an amazing time. It therefore didn't take long for the friends I had met on that expedition to convince me to join them in the Caprivi, Namibia.

Having initially missed my connecting flights, I was starting to think that this may not be the wonderful adventure I was expecting. However, on my belated arrival to the Caprivi research station I immediately relaxed on seeing the friendly faces of our Oman crew including Khalid our ranger in Oman!

It was lovely to see our wonderful group reunited in a different setting together with some new faces. The familiarity

of our non-stop chit-chat, good humour and, strangely, the trademark dirty feet of our expedition leader were very welcoming indeed!

Some nights we would sleep under the African sky, waking up at regular intervals to check traps for a much anticipated capture. The excitement of a potential capture kept me up most of the night, which surprisingly didn't bother me as it gave me time to gaze at the stars and enjoy a symphony of lion calls, hippos and bell frogs!

The community surveys gave me a wonderful insight into a world so far removed from my own haunts in Sydney. The locals were lovely, children adorable and took much delight at my lame attempts to speak their local Lozi language!

On our final day, our team decided to take a swim in the river. Both Khalid and I refused. We didn't swim, couldn't swim and didn't like the water. After much persuasion, however, we grudgingly entered. A couple of hours playing water frisbee in a natural river, in the middle of the African bush with a great bunch of people ensured that

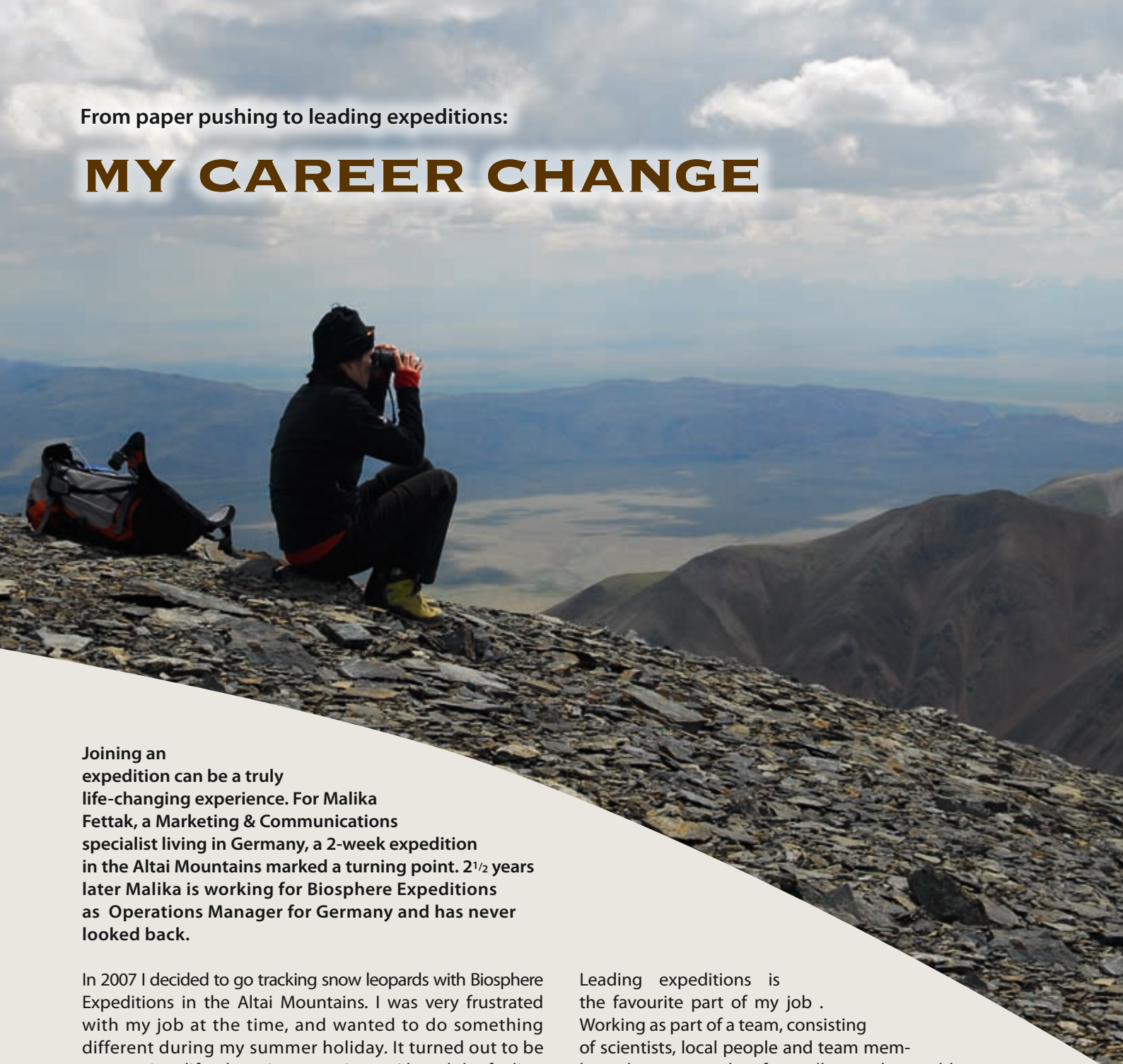
Khalid and I were the last people to leave the water, and very reluctantly I may add!

So on which Biosphere expedition will our group reunite next? Perhaps something a little closer to home – see you in Western Australia! ■



From paper pushing to leading expeditions:

# MY CAREER CHANGE



**Joining an expedition can be a truly life-changing experience. For Malika Fettak, a Marketing & Communications specialist living in Germany, a 2-week expedition in the Altai Mountains marked a turning point. 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> years later Malika is working for Biosphere Expeditions as Operations Manager for Germany and has never looked back.**

In 2007 I decided to go tracking snow leopards with Biosphere Expeditions in the Altai Mountains. I was very frustrated with my job at the time, and wanted to do something different during my summer holiday. It turned out to be an amazing, life-changing experience. I loved the feeling of getting back to basics and working within a highly motivated team in one of the most remote and beautiful parts of the planet. It was a great learning experience, and I realised what I could achieve by overcoming personal fears and doubts. Being cut off from my mundane everyday duties for two weeks, I finally made a decision. I resigned from my job a couple of months later.

Part of me is still wondering how it all happened. My full-time job at Biosphere Expeditions gives me a great work-life balance. I'm able to use the skills gained from my education and past work experience to advance nature conservation and research. I still do a fair bit of paper pushing but also have opportunities to travel, lead expeditions and spend time out in the field with enthusiastic people.

Leading expeditions is the favourite part of my job . Working as part of a team, consisting of scientists, local people and team members thrown together from all over the world makes it a truly unique experience. Every expedition is different, and you never know what the next day will bring. My next expedition will take me to Slovakia, to track lynx and wolf in the Tatra mountains using snow shoes. ■

*At work: on expedition Caprivi/Namibia*





From the North American office:

## PROFILE OF TWO “SERIAL BIOSPHERIANS”

With five expeditions - nearly one every year since 2003 - under their belts, Janet and Alan Hoffberg of Florida might be considered “serial Biospherians.” The Hoffbergs shared what drives their passion for volunteering for conservation. Roseann Hanson reports.

“We are active people, now in our 60s, but in our 40s at heart!” Alan explains. “We enjoy working with wildlife and we volunteer as teachers at zoos, including Central Florida Zoological Park and Botanical Garden, and the Australia Zoo with Terri Irwin and her late husband Steve.” The pair began researching volunteer opportunities in 2003, choosing Biosphere Expeditions because the projects clearly involve team members in meaningful scientific work that translates into conservation action.

“Biosphere Expeditions presents its scientific research to local governmental entities, which often do not have the resources to validate or prove their beliefs and policies, so they can then take positive action such as plan for new protected areas or create management plans”, Alan says. Another aspect of Biosphere Expeditions’ work that is important to the Hoffbergs is the training provided to local people, so they can carry on the project(s) and utilise available resources. “This provides job opportunities and increases local people’s knowledge and skills”, explains Alan.

It is the chance to make a real difference that keeps them coming back year

after year as Biospherians. Janet shared one of her most special experiences. On their Peru expedition, a few team members visited the local staff in their small farm behind base camp and saw a juvenile blue and gold macaw, which they were caring for. “Using our knowledge of macaws derived from working with macaws and cockatoos at the zoo, we explained why the parrot’s diet of scrambled egg was inappropriate for nutrition and why it was essential to train the bird how to forage on its own. We also explained why the macaw needed to learn to grip a branch and why it was inappropriate to house the bird on the ground or table top.

Alan and I trained the parrot how to use its beak to assist in climbing vines, and its claws to grip branches. We introduced fruits and nuts into its diet. At the end of our slot, we had the macaw flying in and around the local area. One of our slot members stayed for the following slot and she reported to us the macaw was foraging on its own. While this animal interaction was neither anticipated nor planned, using our knowledge and skills, we had the opportunity to provide one of the wild animals with the ability to care for itself and, more importantly, educate others.”

Alan recently helped Biosphere Expeditions establish its 501(c)(3) non-profit organisational status in the U.S. “In addition to receiving the satisfaction and enjoyment from participating in a project or expedition, U.S. participants may now deduct a portion of their contribution and travel costs from their taxes,” Alan explains. ■

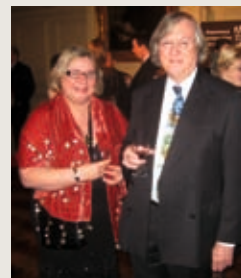


**T**en years in conservation (1999 – 2009) gave Biosphere Expeditions a good reason to celebrate in style. An impressive line up of speakers, former team members, conservation enthusiasts, expedition leaders and staff gathered in Cambridge in December 2009 to exchange first-hand information on conservation both at global and local level. The speakers were all experts in their own right, with a wealth of knowledge and experience in their fields.



Kristian Teleki, Vice President of Science Initiatives at Seaweb, a communications-based non-profit organisation set up to advance ocean conservation, gave insights into the future of the oceans. Kristian reported on the devastating impact of climate change on marine ecosystems, painting a bleak picture of the future. However, he also stressed how it is up to us collectively and as individuals to take action to reduce our ocean footprint and to change our behaviour to protect our oceans.

Jon Shrides, a marine biologist and Fisheries Officer from Jersey told the audience about his hands-on marine conservation work around the world, including leading Biosphere Expeditions' diving expedition in Honduras. In-depth knowledge and experience was flavoured with humour when Jon took the audience for an underwater dive from the Caribbean coral reefs all the way to the UK to greet the local UK lobster. Please refer to page 9 to read more about the global and local adventures of this all-round expert.



# 10 YEAR

Tessa McGregor, a journalist, scientist and a recognised expert on big cat conservation, gave an inspiring talk on the field work she has carried out over the years. With a passionate approach to wildlife accompanied by a wealth of scientific knowledge and a big heart, Tessa led us from the Altai Republic and Arabian Peninsula to India then back to her home in Scotland. Read more about the troubles of tigers, snow leopards and lynx, and the ultimate challenge of big cat conservation on page 6.



Chris Gerrard, Director of Living Landscapes at the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough in the UK, told the audience about the Great Fen Project. This initiative is an ambitious conservation effort that aims to create a 3,700 hectare wetland habitat between Huntingdon and Peterborough. In addition to providing a haven for wildlife and rare fen plants, the Great Fen Project will create a massive green space for people, opening new opportunities for recreation, education and business.





# CELEBRATION DAY

The idea of Biosphere Expeditions was born in Cambridge a decade ago, which made this historic university city a perfect location for the event. The dinner was served at Magdalene College, in the candle-lit 16th century hall decorated for Christmas.



The 10 Year Anniversary Celebration Day was kindly sponsored by Land Rover.

Land Rover continues to support Biosphere Expeditions as part of its integrated approach to sustainability. Luke Eastley from Land Rover handed over a new expedition vehicle to enable research in remote areas.



## Flagship 2009 quotes and comments:

"Listening to and discussing conservation issues with knowledgeable speakers was a privilege, and in particular Kristian Teleki's talk opened my eyes to the level of destruction occurring in the oceans and seas, which largely goes unseen and ignored despite it being on the scale of the destruction of the rainforests. As a result I realise the importance of everyone doing something, however small, such as checking the origin of seafood products in supermarkets, to help the future of the environment. Thank you to the speakers and to Biosphere Expeditions for an informative day." *Katie Bunting*

"I'd like to thank everyone at Biosphere for such a successful and enjoyable day in Cambridge last weekend. From start to finish everything was just right. I thought all the talks were excellent and really interesting, the food was good, as was the wine, it was a lovely venue and there was lots of good company! Thank you all." *Viv Siderfin*

"The event was a fantastic opportunity to learn about scientific research but most importantly to see how this impacted on everyday life, for people and the wildlife it encapsulates. Please pass on our thanks to the commitment and passion of all the speakers - well done Biosphere Expeditions for knowing such interesting and informed people!! I thought the day was a real credit to your organisation because you had an opportunity to "sell" your product, and instead you focused on what matters and let nature sell itself. Thank you for being focused on the quality of your work and not the quantity of the projects you can offer. Not to mention the food was delicious and everyone scrubbed up pretty well too! Many thanks." *Nicola Woodward & Laura Tedstone*

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## BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS RESEARCH BOOSTED BY NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH SWAROVSKI OPTIK

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### High-quality optics help to discover the unseen.

Swarovski Optik became Biosphere Expeditions' latest corporate supporter in 2009, and are now instrumental in the running of many field projects such as jaguar and puma research in Brazil, and snow leopard research in the Altai mountains in Central Asia.

High quality optical devices such as telescopes and binoculars are essential to the work of Biosphere Expeditions. They not only help expedition members to experience nature up close, but also increase the accuracy of scientific observations. For example, in the wilds of the Altai Mountains, finding animals can be challenging. The expedition teams use different methods for locating animals, from looking for tracks and signs to direct observation of the animals themselves. A mountain peak with a commanding view of surrounding valleys and mountains makes a perfect observation point, and this is where Swarovski optical instruments really come into their own.



Andrew Stronach, expedition leader for the snow leopard research, explains, "We use Swarovski telescopes to methodically search for animals, often spotting them kilometres away thanks to the very powerful telescopes Swarovski Optik provide us with. These animals can be undetectable with binoculars, even when we know where they are."

Stronach continues, "At closer range, Swarovski binoculars allow us to identify and record features of individual animals. This enables us, for example, to log data on the age and sex structures of groups, which is very important biological information that would be out of our grasp without high quality optical instruments."

The name Swarovski has become a global synonym for crystal jewellery with over 100 years' experience in the field. Its history dates back to 1895, when Daniel Swarovski established his company after inventing the world's first electric grinding machine for precious stones. The company was set up in the province of Tyrol, Austria.

In 1935, Wilhelm Swarovski, an avid hobby astronomer and naturalist, used the company's expertise in cutting glass and crystals to build himself a pair of binoculars. He did this by developing a novel prism fabrication and grinding process. Swarovski Optik was established in 1949, thus laying the foundation for a precision optics company with a global reputation. The company's first Habicht 7x42 binoculars are still an industry standard.

Swarovski Optik is certified to ISO-14001 standard, which means that state of the art technologies are applied throughout production and have minimal environmental impact. Swarovski Optik's appreciation of and respectful way of dealing with nature extends to supporting species protection and nature conservation projects all over the world.

Biosphere Expeditions is delighted to be one of the few partners in Swarovski Optik's travel and nature sponsorship programme. Andreas Pittl, Swarovski Optik's Head of Marketing Nature says, "Biosphere Expeditions is a very important part of our commitment towards conservation and Swarovski Optik is proud to be supporting their wildlife conservation efforts all over the globe." ■

# BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS: EMPOWERED BY PARTNERS

Our global corporate partners are crucial in reducing our running and expedition costs. For example, Land Rover sponsors Biosphere Expeditions as part of its integrated approach to sustainability. This includes supplying expedition vehicles and making vital research possible in remote areas around the globe.

Kathy Wilden, Director of Biosphere Expeditions, says, "We are delighted to be part of Land Rover's Fragile Earth programme. In Land Rover we have found an excellent Global Partner with a strong corporate conscience. Their sponsorship enables us to run expeditions to some of the most remote and inaccessible places on the planet, reducing our running and expedition costs by providing extremely capable expedition vehicles and lots of other support."



Swarovski Optik, another partner, is a world leader in the manufacture of precision and premium sports optics. Swarovski supports Biosphere Expeditions with Swarovski binoculars, telescopes, range finders, image intensifiers and optronic devices, as well as sponsorship and other back-up.



SWAROVSKI  
OPTIK

Motorola, makers of radio and other communications equipment, provide all important rugged and reliable communication tools such as handheld and vehicle radios, mobile and satellite phones, as well as sponsorship and other communications and logistical in-country back-up.



Globetrotter Ausrüstung (Germany), Cotswold Outdoors (UK), Snowgum (Australia), and REI (North America) all supply Biosphere Expeditions with essential expedition equipment and also assist expedition team members kitting themselves out for the expeditions.

[www.Globetrotter.de](http://www.Globetrotter.de)  
Ausrüstung



In addition, Biosphere Expeditions works with a host of science partners, including United Nations Environment Programme, International Coral Reef Action Network, and WWF Russia.





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