

What's New?

Keep up to date with new initiatives and activities that are fostering research and practice pertinent to *EcoHealth* readers. In this issue, you can find out about:

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- EcoSummit 2007—Beijing, China
- FAO and OIE International Scientific Conference on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds
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Regular updates are also available at the *EcoHealth* website: <http://www.ecohealth.net>

GLOBAL EARLY WARNING AND RESPONSE SYSTEM (GLEWS)

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization (WHO) joined together in July 2006 to launch the Global Early Warning and Response System (GLEWS) for emerging zoonoses. It hopes to better predict and respond to animal diseases generally, with a special focus on those transmissible to humans.

Global infrastructure for early detection and response to zoonotic diseases has been lacking, and in the cases of diseases such as SARS and avian influenza, this has contributed to the global spread of disease. GLEWS aims to assist early detection by linking animal and public health

entities through “sharing of information, epidemiological analysis and joint field missions to assess and control outbreaks in animals and humans.”

GLEWS has set up a web-based platform to gather information from their organizations. The three institutions will collectively analyze the information and decide whether to issue alert messages with possible implications on different spatial levels, and whether a joint, coordinated response from the organizations is required.

See the press release at: <http://www.who.int/media-centre/news/new/2006/nw02/en/index.html>

EcoSUMMIT 2007—BEIJING, CHINA

Hosted by the Ecological Society of China, EcoSummit 2007 will take place May 22–27, 2007 at the Beijing International Convention Center with the general theme of “Ecological Complexity and Sustainability: Challenges and Opportunities for 21st-Century’s Ecology.” This international conference aims to “encourage a greater integration of both the natural and social sciences with the policy and decision-making community to develop a better understanding of the complex nature of ecological systems” to provide the basis for sustainable problem solving. Partly supported by Elsevier Publishing, a number of Elsevier journals are planning special issues from conference submissions, including *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, *Global Environmental Change*, *Biological Conservation*, *Land Use Policy*, and many more (see <http://www.ecosummit2007.elsevier.com/journals.htm> for a more complete list).

Oral presentation abstracts are due by January 15, 2007. See <http://www.ecosummit2007.elsevier.com/> for more information on the conference.

FAO AND OIE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE ON AVIAN INFLUENZA AND WILD BIRDS

Bringing together 300 participants from over 90 countries, the International Scientific Conference on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds convened by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) was held in Rome, Italy on May 30–31, 2006. As the recommendations document put forth by the group states, “[m]uch of the known AI virus ecology in wildlife is based on knowledge of low pathogenic avian influenza strains (LPAI) and has been extrapolated to H5N1. This body of information is valuable, but cannot explain all facets of H5N1 epidemiology or ecology in wild avian species, as it is becoming clear that HPAI [highly pathogenic avian influenza] H5N1 is distinctly different than previously studied LPAI strains.” This meeting sought to make a contribution to the understanding of H5N1 and the role that factors such as migratory birds and wildlife trade may play in the ecology of this disease. Topics such as the current global situation of AI, gaps in knowledge, recent outbreaks found in wild birds, surveillance and sampling, and risk analysis were discussed as part of the program.

The recommendations report issued includes relevant background on H5N1 work and strategies to date, 10 resolutions, as well as recommendations of strategies such as early warning systems and surveillance, epidemiology, areas of needed research, and contingency planning and management of HPAI H5N1.

Accepted abstracts are available in the Proceedings of the Conference. More information can be found at: http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/conference/index_en.html and http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/special_avian.html

PREVENTING DISEASE THROUGH HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

The World Health Organization (WHO) has released the report “Preventing Disease through Healthy Environments: Towards an Estimate of the Environmental Burden of Disease.” This report quantitatively estimates how specific diseases are influenced by environmental risk factors, examining the impacts of environmental risks on over 80 diseases and injuries. Special attention is paid to

environmental risks affecting both physical health and unhealthy behaviors that have the ability to be altered, through behavioral, medical, policy, or technological modifications.

In quantifying the environmental burden of disease, the report states that “an estimated 24% of the global disease burden and 23% of all deaths can be attributed to environmental factors,” with the proportion of deaths in children 0–14 as high as 36%. Leading the group of analyzed diseases was diarrhea, with an estimated 94% of the burden of disease contributed by the environment. Hygiene, poor sanitation, and unsafe drinking water were found to be the major risk factors associated with this disease burden. Differences among regions were also assessed, with developing countries having a disproportionately large environmental burden of communicable diseases; developed countries had a higher per capita impact of cancer and cardiovascular disease; and no difference was found between developed and developing countries’ fraction of noncommunicable diseases related to environmental factors.

The full report can be found at: http://www.who.int/quantifying_ehimpacts/publications/preventingdisease/en/index.html

GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY GROUP (GEIG)—CONFERENCE REPORT

A small meeting of the Global Ecological Integrity Group (GEIG) convened on the Greek Island of Samos, July 4–9, 2006. The meeting reflected the expertise of GEIG as a whole (a group of over 200 experts in biology, ecology, economics, ethics, geography, law, medicine, philosophy, and public health) and included representatives from Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, New Zealand, Nigeria, Poland, and the USA. The mission of GEIG is to “push the boundaries of scholarly endeavor through inter- and trans-disciplinary engagement on matters affecting and governing the sustainability of life for both present and future generations.” In that vein, the GEIG representatives forged even closer links with The Earth Charter (http://www.earthcharterusa.org/earth_charter.html) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Commission on Ethics and Law’s Ethics Specialist Group (<http://www.iucn.org/themes/law/cel01.html>) at this most recent meeting. Additional project initiatives under the aegis of these organizations and jointly

with interested GEIG members have been identified for the coming year.

Notable presentations at the Samos meeting included: "Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Eco-footprint Crime"; "Biological/Ecological Integrity Model"; "The Millennium Development Goals: Narrowing the Gap by 2015 through Attention to Values and Ethics in Environmental Health Risk Assessment"; "Adapting Water Management to Global Climate Change and Other Hydropolitical Stresses"; and "Justice, Ecology and Health."

An important outcome from the Samos conference was agreement on the need for advocacy, in particular recognizing that in big business' general disregard for environmental sustainability, indigenous peoples of the world and our children are the contemporary canaries, being the most vulnerable to environmental harms. Further, it is apparent that most participants are facing major challenges to their work—professionally, institutionally, politically, and personally. The viability of morally serious "global citizenship" is threatened, and GEIG aims to promote and sustain it.

Next year's conference will be held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada under the aegis of GEIG, the Elizabeth May Chair in Sustainability and Environment, and Dalhousie University. The theme for GEIG 2007 is: "Ecological Integrity and a Sustainable Society." This conference, different from previous GEIG conferences, will be more advocacy focused for translating science into law and policy. To be added to the GEIG e-mail distribution list, please contact Colin Soskolne, e-mail: colin.soskolne@ualberta.ca. The GEIG website was formally launched at the conference; more information on the conference and the presentations

given there can be found at <http://www.globalecointegrity.net/>

U.S. NATIONAL REPORT ON POPULATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In September 2006, the Center for Environment and Population (CEP), an organization examining the relationships between human population, resource consumption, and the environment, released its latest report on the U.S. population's effects on the environment on both local and global scales. This report presents a population profile and examines the population trends' impacts on and links to environmental sectors including land use, water, forests, biological diversity, fisheries and aquatic resources, agriculture, energy, climate change, and waste.

Notable is their identification of the southern and western U.S. as a "population and environment hot spot," with the 9 out of 10 of the fastest growing states in these areas. Population increases are being seen in areas with vulnerable coastal ecosystems and in arid western regions, affecting freshwater supplies, land use, and wildlife habitat.

Also identified are the challenges of urban sprawl and its effects as the U.S. population continues its shift from predominantly rural to urban and suburban. The overall population grew by 17%, while the amount of developed land grew 47% during the 1980s and 1990s. In the Midwestern U.S., land was developed at nearly five times the rate of population growth (32% vs. 7%) during 1982 to 1997.

The report can be found at: <http://www.cepnet.org/>

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