



# The Buffon Declaration

## Natural History Institutions and the Environmental Crisis

### Concluding Message from the Buffon Symposium - October 18th and 19th, 2007 Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris

*Representatives of 93 natural history institutions (natural history museums and research institutes, botanic gardens, zoos...) from 36 countries from all continents met in Paris on 18th and 19th October, 2007, on the occasion of the tercentenary of the birth of Buffon, one of the great founding fathers of the scientific study of the diversity of life.*

Given that science is critical for sustainable management of biodiversity and ecosystems and, through it, survival of human populations on this planet, the vital contributions of these institutions are fourfold.

- They are the primary repositories of the scientific samples on which understanding of the variety of life is ultimately based.
- Through leading-edge research they extend knowledge of the structure and dynamics of biodiversity in the present and in the past.
- Through partnerships, and through programs of training and capacity-building, they strengthen the global capability to address current and future environmental challenges.
- They are a forum for direct engagement with civil society, which is indispensable for helping bring about the changes of behaviour on which our common future and the future of nature depend.

Today natural history institutions have particular responsibilities because global biodiversity is collapsing. Current approaches are inadequate in the face of this challenge. We therefore reaffirm our commitment to work together, and to develop new integrated approaches to understand and address the environmental crisis, and to communicate the issues to the public, policy makers and a broad range of stakeholders.

We make three recommendations:

1) Collections of specimens and other databases on nature are a model of nature's variability and are a part of the world's scientific infrastructure (as exemplified by the OECD Global Science Forum). They are crucial tools for understanding the impact of climate change, of biodiversity loss, and other environmental challenges, but natural history collections are nowadays disappearing in many countries due to lack of funding.

**We therefore call on governments and organisations to give the conservation of these vital collections increased levels of support.**

2) Naturalist research in the field is essential for the continued gathering and dissemination of information, as well as training and capacity-building initiatives. As a group, natural history institutions have developed, and will continue to develop and implement, best practice in this area. However, current policy changes derived from the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity have made research, and the management of collections for scientific research on biodiversity, increasingly difficult and expensive.

**We therefore call on governments and the Convention on Biological Diversity :**

- to recognize the difference between profit-oriented bioprospecting and science-oriented research for the public good, and
- to facilitate non-commercial biodiversity collecting and the movement of specimens,

**in their approaches to Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS), including through their development of policy and regulations.**

3) Evolution is without doubt the most acceptable explanation for the diversity of life. It is crucial that only such empirical and testable approaches are accepted as "scientific" when discussing evolution. **We strongly urge that support be given for the dissemination of scientific perspectives, which is our duty as outreach organisations, and for the teaching of evolution in schools.**

**In conclusion**, the participants in the Buffon Symposium express the desire that scientists, policy makers and civil society unite in their efforts to achieve sustainable management of nature and the maintenance and restoration of ecosystems and their services upon which civilization depends. We reaffirm our conviction that a flourishing development model that is compatible with a sustainable natural world is possible. We are enthusiastic regarding the contributions we can make through our missions in this context, which consist of extending human knowledge of nature, training specialists of all kinds, and sharing knowledge with the public, particularly young people. We strongly affirm our capacity to provide an unbiased forum for the development of new ideas and new approaches among all the stakeholders concerned.

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The Buffon International Symposium was held at the French Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle on October 18 and 19, 2007, on the occasion of the 300th Anniversary of Buffon's birth. More than 200 participants discussed the following theme:

“Natural History Museums and Institutions in the 21st century: Impact on our common future.”

Three major foreign institutions were co-organizers together with the Muséum: the Natural History Museum, London (UK), the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (UK) and the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington (USA).

For more information, proceedings of the Symposium are available through the link: <http://www.mnhn.fr/buffon-en>

