# New website gives conservationists tools to tackle climate change

Title

To be able to teach something, you have to have mastered it yourself. So training conservationists worldwide how to teach others to take local action for nature in a changing climate is no easy task.

Fortunately, in a project funded and facilitated by the **Cambridge Conservation Initiative** (**CCI** ? a unique collaboration between conservation organisations clustered around Cambridge, including BirdLife, and the University of Cambridge), 25 authors and contributors from nine organisations have the combined experience and expertise to achieve just that. The collective effort also went even further, drawing in know-how from institutions outside of Cambridge. By fostering collaborations between CCI partners, CCI was the spark that ignited the project in 2010.

Entitled ?*Preparing teaching materials and building capacity to link biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services and climate change?,* the project today launches a new **teaching-materials website** that provides free training factsheets on 10 prioritised topics, targeted at early- to mid- career conservation practitioners. These training materials and tools not only aim to make the complex subjects of biodiversity, ecosystem services and climate change clearly understandable, but in a way that enables readers to then take this deepened knowledge forward to train others.

> *?Think of this project as a seed-dispersing machine, with 10 arms that are scattering packets of knowledge out to conservationists worldwide. Once sowed, these seeds have the potential to make a real impact on the ground for nature and people as the climate changes. This is capacity building for conservation,? said Kiragu Mwangi, Project Leader and Conservation Leadership Programme Manager.*

**As the impacts of climate change become more apparent, the need for a worldwide line-up of enthusiastic conservation leaders who understand the intricacies of climate change?s effects on nature and people has never been greater**. This is why BirdLife International, Conservation International, Fauna & Flora International, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Conservation Leadership Programme, the Tropical Biology Association, UNEP-WCMC, The Mediterranean Science Commission and the University of Cambridge joined forces for the project, which proved a worthwhile challenge.

> *?Simplifying such broad and interlinking topics so that they can be used for teaching turned out to require plenty of coffee on the table at meetings,? said Robert Munroe, Climate Change Officer at BirdLife who was part of the technical team that prepared the teaching materials. ?This is where the power of collaboration became important, with a diverse team that was able to draw from knowledge experienced across the globe.?*

The factsheets cover topics such as: ?climate change?, ?reducing impacts of climate change on biodiversity and adaptive management?, and ?policy responses for the future?. Each one contains condensed and clear information identified and referenced by contributors; combined with Case Studies that demonstrate the material in action; Key Points; Key Questions and Key Tools for trainees to discover and utilise. The production of the material on the topic *?Valuing nature and evaluating environmental risk?* pulled in expertise from outside of Cambridge. Environmental economists from Conservation International (CI) and The Mediterranean Science Commission (CIESM), in conjunction with the Cambridge Programme for Sustainable Leadership, shaped how the material could be used by conservationists and business professionals alike.

The collaboration led to an evolution of the project aims. Originally targeted at business leaders as well as conservationists, the outside expertise adjusted the material to inform conservationists how instead *they themselves* can frame the material to business leaders. This improved the clarity of the resources and will mean those with local knowledge can make better-informed local changes.

To help fine-tune the training materials, as well as build capacity, training workshops organised by the Tropical Biology Association in Arusha, Tanzania, June 2011, and by BirdLife International in Kumming, China, May 2012, allowed the tools to be tested. For example, one issue identified was that even if the bigger picture of an issue is understood, articulating a discussion with local stakeholders on it ? key to starting a project or pioneering a change ? is more difficult. This issue, and others highlighted by conservation practitioners from many different countries, were incorporated back into the development of the training materials.

While it may have taken time to decide on the specific ingredients during the preparation phase, this project was definitely not a case of ?too many cooks spoil the broth?. Facilitated by CCI, the collaboration of many ?master-chefs? of conservation in the production of these teaching materials has made the important task of training conservationists worldwide a lot easier. Dr Mike Rands, Executive Director of CCI, highlighted the value of the project:

> *?Understanding the interconnections between biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services and climate change is imperative to sustainable living and the quality of all life on Earth. This innovative project has created vital and practical materials for capacity building that I hope will be significant in transforming decision making for the natural world.?*

Basang Lamao, an attendee to the workshop in China, is looking forward to using her strengthened understanding of climate change issues, boding well for the use of these tools in the future.

> *?I will be one of the first people to share such information with local people on the Tibetan Plateau,? she said.*

**website: Building capacity in biodiversity consevation, ecosystem services and climate change**