

Michael Soule organized International Conference on Research in Conservation Biology, to be held at Third College

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The increasingly rapid disappearance of various forms of plant and animal life as well as the destruction of their natural habitats can pose serious threats to human welfare in the future, according to Michael Soule, a conservation biologist at the University of California, San Diego.

"The challenge of conserving natural diversity cannot be ignored by responsible biologists," says Soule. "For instance, tropical forests are disappearing at the rate of 50 acres a minute, and about 90 percent of animal species are tropical."

To help search for answers to this problem, Soule has organized the first International Conference on Research in Conservation Biology, to be held at The Third College at the University of California, San Diego September 6-9.

Among the featured participants will be Dr. Paul Ehrlich of Stanford University, who will give the keynote speech at a banquet to be held at the San Diego Wild Animal Park the evening of September 7. Attendance at the conference will be by invitation only.

Other notable speakers will include: Thomas Lovejoy, program director of the World Wildlife Fund; William Conway, director of the New York Zoo; Dr. Kurt Benirschke, M.D., director of research for the San Diego Zoo, and professor of pathology at UC San Diego, and Jared Diamond of UCLA.

"The purpose of this international conference," said Soule, "is to further encourage the development of theory and application in the following areas:

--The design and management of nature reserves to maximize habitat and species diversity and minimize interference from human habitation, agriculture, industry and recreation.

--The management of individual species populations, in order to maintain their fitness and enhance evolutionary potential.

--The captive propagation of seriously threatened and economically important species."

Soule outlined two goals for the conference.

"First, we want to focus the attention of the biological community, particular population biologists, on nature conservation as an area overdue for the application of existing theory and technology," he said.

"The second goal is to emphasize the complementary roles of population genetics and ecology. Surprisingly little research and thought has been devoted to 'conservation genetics.'"

Soule said he expects between 50 and 70 attendees to gather for the meeting, which will be presented in two formats.

The first half of each day will be devoted to talks by invited speakers, while the sessions will be spent on discussions and workshops.

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