

IUCN WCPA TRIBUTE TO DR KATHY MACKINNON (1948–2023)



Kathy and Deputy Chair Julia Miranda on the ferry across to the International Academy for Nature Conservation on Insel Vilm

Penelope Figgis AO, IUCN WCPA Vice Chair for Oceania 2005 – 2021. With thanks to Kathy’s family, Karen Richardson, Marc Hockings, Stephen Woodley, Nigel Dudley, Sue Stolton and Trevor Sandwith for assistance in preparing this tribute.

On the 18th March when the family informed the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of the sudden loss of our former Chair, Dr Kathy MacKinnon, her three sons recognised Kathy had “a second family in the conservation world and WCPA”. The news flowed rapidly across the world to all continents. It shocked and saddened a wide range of people from NGOs, government agencies, rangers in the field, the science community and indigenous peoples and local communities. The conservation community valued Kathy as a devoted, innovative, advocate for the living Earth, its species, protected areas and all conservation efforts globally. While books could, and should, be written on her rich life, the WCPA wishes to focus on her profound contributions to conservation outcomes. Over the last 14 years she offered her immense capabilities to WCPA’s global goals which have now been substantially adopted as the world’s goals.

Kathy told the story of her childhood living in a mining town near Durham and at an early age hearing about some top school called ‘Oxford’. She emphatically announced she would go there. Local teachers recognised her high intelligence and ensured she achieved her goal. In 1976, she received her PhD in Zoology (on squirrels) from Oxford University and spent ten years in Indonesia with then husband Dr John MacKinnon producing major research and publications on tropical ecology, biodiversity and protected areas planning and management, while at the same time raising three sons.

In 1994, Kathy was appointed the Lead Biodiversity Specialist with the World Bank where she found ways to integrate conservation outcomes with economic development. She pioneered the effort to mainstream biodiversity into the Bank’s operations using Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding. In that role, she also helped launch the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and supported countless Bank-led GEF projects. The result was the protection of millions of hectares of vital ecosystems across the world. In this role she worked with international and national conservation NGOs as well as government agencies in many developing countries creating a formidable network. The evidence of what such assistance meant to people was visible at any conference where representatives from every continent would enthusiastically hail and embrace her. This impact was also evident in many of the tributes made following her passing.

At the World Bank, Kathy frequently interacted with IUCN and WCPA supporting protected area projects, publications and other knowledge products. In particular, she was passionate about, and supported, the publication of many local language field guides, which stood proudly on her bookshelves next to the many technical documents about integrating conservation in development. David Shepherd who headed IUCN’s Programme on Protected Areas for many years says “*Kathy was an enormous supporter of The Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas, the forerunner of WCPA. She was always a source of practical guidance and advice, always able to find, or suggest, avenues of financial assistance to assist in supporting the establishment and better management of protected areas around the world. Kathy was very closely involved in the planning and implementation of the 2003 IUCN World*

Parks Congress and her input and ideas played a major role in the implementation of this landmark Congress.”

In 2009, working with several leading organisations, Kathy supported the preparation of *Natural Solutions*, a significant publication that made the case for protected areas and their role in addressing the impacts of climate change. Kathy working with colleagues communicated this perspective into the negotiations that led to the adoption of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and its 20 Aichi Targets. Its influence was far reaching. Long term friends and frequent collaborators Nigel Dudley and Sue Stolton commented that the work on natural solutions led to Julia Miranda (then the head of Colombia’s protected area system) taking this up in her region, and ultimately led to a declaration from 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries adopting a declaration and commitment on protected areas as natural solutions to climate change. This was presented as part of the negotiations on the Paris Agreement in 2015.

Kathy retired from the World Bank soon after in 2010. WCPA Chair Nik Lophoukine persuaded her to join WCPA’s Steering Committee as a specialist on issues related to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The following 11 years saw Kathy dedicate her immense capacity, knowledge and contacts principally to WCPA while still maintaining senior roles in other international conservation bodies. In 2012 Kathy became a very active and competent Deputy Chair of WCPA, more like a Co-Chair according to the then Chair, Ernesto Enkerlin. She was subsequently elected by the IUCN World Conservation Congress as WCPA Chair and IUCN Council member in 2016 until 2021. Over this period she was also a dedicated member of the World Protected Areas Leadership Forum.

The 2010 – 2021 period was an intense but productive time for WCPA. Its strategy was strongly shaped by the adoption of the Aichi Targets at Nagoya in 2010. Target 11 was of major importance in setting direction for systems of protected and conserved areas that not only represented the most important areas for conserving biodiversity, but highlighted that they also needed to be equitably governed and effectively managed. Under Kathy’s guidance, WCPA prepared many important resource documents to support governments and organisations to implement Target 11 across all of its dimensions. Kathy’s energetic and inclusive leadership was vital. She became Chair of the CBD’s Target 11 Partnership, which spurred efforts across the world to achieve all elements of the Target. The head of conservation in the CBD Secretariat, Sarat Babu Gidda, called Kathy ‘his Angel’. The tribute was well deserved



Kathy at the Midori Prize ceremony, Japan, 2018

both for her constant championship of the goals, but also for undoubtedly receiving more calls from Sarat in his profound dedication to achieving the target than any other person. While Target 11 didn’t quite reach its goal it achieved a great deal worldwide in protected area growth and the development and application of higher standards of management and governance.

In the decade up to 2020 the Commission’s specialist groups and task forces produced globally outstanding products aimed at the implementation of all components of this goal. Kathy was very active in these groups working closely with IUCN staff led by Trevor Sandwith head of the Global Protected Areas Programme. Kathy and other WCPA experts were constant members and contributors to IUCN’s many delegations to the Convention on Biological Diversity. They defined international nature conservation policy and generated key elements of guidance for the CBD in all matters related to protected areas. These included best practice guidelines, technical notes, and numerous articles while piloting and testing training materials. Kathy was deeply involved with most initiatives and was a major presenter of their content at conferences.

She was particularly dedicated to ensuring the WCPA produced high-quality guidance beyond declarations to ensure the equitable governance and effective management of protected areas. A major tool in achieving effective systems of protected and conserved



Two Aichi Target 11 champions, Kathy with Sarat Babu Gidda from the CBD Secretariat

areas is the IUCN Green List Standard initiated first in 2009 by long standing WCPA expert Dr Marc Hockings and adopted by the IUCN Council in 2017 having been launched at the IUCN World Parks Congress in 2014. In Marc's tribute he said *"Her support for WCPA's initiatives on management effectiveness in those early years was pivotal - especially in getting it integrated into the GEF processes that expanded its impact globally. As Chair of the first IUCN Green List Committee she was both a great supporter and staunch defender of the integrity of the Green List Standard."*

In the middle of these already crowded years was the IUCN World Parks Congress 2014 in Sydney Australia. For WCPA it was a huge organisational endeavour, but a great success attracting over 6,000 delegates from 170 countries in Sydney's Olympic Park from 12–19 November 2014. Kathy, then Deputy Chair had a major role as the Chair of the Programme Working Group and member of the International Steering Committee. A large preparatory meeting was held in Cuernavaca, Mexico hosted by then Chair, Ernesto Enkerlin, with many of the world's protected area experts. During the Congress

Kathy was a presenter as well as a key organiser and problem solver. The conference led to commitments to take forward the key concepts of modern protected and conserved areas set out in the document *The Promise of Sydney*. These included innovative partnerships, respect and involvement of Indigenous peoples, prioritising important biodiversity areas, ensuring ecological connectivity, advancing equitable and effective governance, building capacity and mentoring of youth, promoting recognition of protected areas as vital to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to human health and well-being.

While pursuing the achievement of Target 11, the next step, shaping the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, became WCPA's priority. Kathy was involved in all the work of specialist groups and task forces especially after she was elected Chair in 2016 at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Hawaii. She particularly worked on defining and guiding the recognition of "other effective area-based conservation measures" (OECMs). This concept laid the foundation for the eventual adoption of the ambitious goal of conserving at least 30% of the world's oceans, terrestrial areas and inland water areas. Recognising the importance of this ambition, Kathy encouraged Harvey Locke, a long-term advocate for major increases in world targets, to create a WCPA Task Force on Beyond the Aichi Targets. Members of this Task Force traveled the world successfully building momentum for the eventual adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and its most prominent Target 3 or simply '30/30' which has been endorsed by 190 nations. It is not immodest to say WCPA and the Task Force can take a significant amount of credit for this dramatic global commitment.

Kathy had been honored in 2007 with the Distinguished Service Award of the Society of Conservation Biology and in 2018 the international community was delighted when her life of dedication to conservation outcomes was recognised by the awarding in Tokyo of the prestigious Midori Prize from the AEON Environmental Foundation and Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The prize honours individuals who have "made outstanding contributions to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity at global, regional or local levels". This honour not only brought credit to Kathy, but also to the IUCN as a whole and was celebrated before 4000 delegates at the CBD COP 14 in Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt in November 2018.

There are numerous contributions and qualities for which Kathy should be remembered, however several stand out. As a person with knowledge and experience



Kathy receiving the the prestigious Midori Prize from the AEON Environmental Foundation, Tokyo 2018

in many areas of the world she was aware of how nations and regions have complex differences of stability, economic and educational capacity and cultural drivers which affect the achievement of conservation goals. She was an enthusiast for regional meetings where people with issues in common could exchange knowledge and form partnerships. She strongly backed the third Latin America and Caribbean Protected Area Congress in 2019 and co-chaired the International Steering Committees for both the Second Asia Parks Congress in Sabah, Malaysia, and the Inaugural IUCN African Protected Areas Congress in Kigali, Rwanda, both in 2022. These major events required a substantial contribution of her time and skills but she was delighted that they were very successful meetings. John Waithaka WCPA Regional

Chair for East and Southern Africa and major Congress organiser stated *“Africa mourns her for making history. She fully and enthusiastically supported our efforts to hold the first Africa Protected Areas Congress.”*

Another important commitment was to ‘bring in the talent’. She respected long standing and committed experts, but was enthusiastic about bringing in fresh thought and ability. She fostered promising young people who had shown by their study choices and actions that they intended to have a lifelong involvement in conservation. Despite WCPA’s very modest resources she always seemed to find some funding to bring young people to major IUCN meetings and was personally a mentor to many. Heather Bingham of the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre praised Kathy’s commitment to the institution as a board member and advisor and added *“On a more personal note, she also recognised potential within our team. Kathy has been a mentor to many of us, nurturing our abilities as young professionals, and supporting us to grow in our roles and develop our networks in the conservation world. She will be deeply missed.”*

Kathy also contributed a great deal through her prolific writing. She was the author of over 100 scientific books and publications, including recent books that promote protected areas as proven natural climate solutions. Stephen Woodley, Former Chief Scientist of Parks Canadian and WCPA Steering Committee member, commented *“We worked together on several publications, first writing a Chapter on ‘Managing Protected Areas for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Function,’ in the now famous WCPA book ‘Protected Area Governance and Management’ led by Graeme Worboys. We co-published eight other referred papers and were on the writing team of the IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs’ technical report on ‘Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures’.* Kathy was an unrelenting coauthor and editor in those efforts, always demanding we make it shorter, clearer and simpler.”

‘Generosity’ is a word used frequently in tributes to Kathy. She was generous with her time, energy, advice, hospitality and her interest in others’ views and lives. She was also generous in finding funding, sometimes at her own cost. Peter Shadie, IUCN colleague reports *“Years ago I remember Kathy using her World Bank travel allowance, which in those days provided for business class travel between Washington and London, to help fund a WCPA publication. She convinced the Bank’s accounts department that she could fly economy and use the difference in a more impactful way for*

conservation". Perhaps another reason Kathy found resources to assist young people and projects was that she had little interest in the trappings of luxury, fine clothes, expensive accommodation or comfortable flights. We all remember her trusty modest backpack and her standard simple trousers and shirts which lasted many years. She was steadfastly economical so WCPA's funds could be used for better causes.

One special memory will remain for many of us. Kathy's last Steering Committee Meeting as Chair was held in 2019 in Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Our accommodation was stunning with a dramatic view of the 5,895 m snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro with large groups of elephants ambling past our conference and monkeys peering in the windows. Although hard workers we soon decided early morning safaris were essential. Kathy allowed this indulgence and enjoyed it herself. It was a particularly positive meeting of people who were far more than colleagues, but close friends. We shall remember that wonderful week and our outstanding leader for the rest of our lives.

Many tributes have been made some capture our dear friend and colleague particularly well.

Madhu Rao Chair of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas

Kathy worked tirelessly, championing protected areas and OECMs as being critically important for biodiversity conservation. Nature has lost one of its greatest allies; we have a responsibility to honour her important legacy by continuing her work the best we can.

Trevor Sandwith, former head IUCN Global Protected Areas Programme and current Director of the Centre for Conservation Action.

"Kathy and I worked together constantly for 25 years on some of the most important topics in conservation. In particular, we were convinced of the need to mainstream biodiversity into social and economic transformation. But I value most the many extensive efforts we made to translate ideas into effective guidance for practitioners, ranging from transboundary conservation to equitable governance of sites. I can just picture Kathy now on the many train trips to the International Nature Conservation Academy on the island of Vilm, furiously editing texts and shaping them to be of greater use for those working in the field. While adamant that standards should be high, Kathy has a tough, but warm, regard for all of our efforts".

Mike Wong, WCPA Vice Chair for North America
"Around our planet, Kathy will always be recognized as a passionate and tireless champion for nature conservation. She constantly elevated the agenda of the WCPA, to drive the actions that the world so sorely needs. Likewise, Kathy will be remembered as an affable friend who motivated us and generously shared her insight, experience, and support. You will be missed."

Simon Stuart, Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission 2008 - 2016

"Kathy You were always a fighter for conservation, you said it as it was, and were a passionate and fearless advocate that we should do our very best for nature. The conservation world is weaker today without your drive, commitment, and of course sense of humour! Thanks so much, Kathy, for everything."