Doing the business for biodiversity

An ice-cream company recently hitched its marketing efforts to an awareness program about threats facing bee pollination. In the process it sold a lot of product. Brendan Wintle reckons threatened species conservation needs to open its eyes to new business opportunities if it is to secure enduring investment. Here’s why.

There is an outstanding, yet underrated, opportunity out there for conserving biodiversity and threatened species, and its name is ‘business’. More specifically, there are opportunities in business that are good for biodiversity and where biodiversity can be very good for business. I’ve long suspected this but two events I’ve recently attended have highlighted what is possible.

The first was the launch of the Threatened Species Commissioner’s Threatened Species Prospectus in February at Taronga Zoo (Sydney). Minister for the Environment and Energy, Josh Frydenberg, TS Commissioner, Gregory Andrews and several representatives from the corporate sector all highlighted the fundamental link between our sense of identity and our amazing native species. This link is not lost on business.

Gregory Andrews talked of sitting in a Qantas plane with an iconic macropod (think red kangaroo) on its tail, flying above the Australian deserts where cats, foxes and human exploitation have driven six macropods to extinction, leaving seven other species hanging by a thread and 18 others vulnerable to extinction. How can we have failed to convince Qantas to sink significant resources into ensuring no more iconic macropods go extinct?

The ‘brand value’ of nature does not end with iconic mammals. At the ‘Conservation Opportunities’ workshop at RMIT in Melbourne. Hosted by Georgia Garrard and Sarah Bekessy at RMIT, the workshop brought together representatives from the corporate, science, government, philanthropy and conservation sectors to brainstorm and develop a range of emerging opportunities for threatened-species conservation.

A number of business opportunities were discussed. James Fitzsimons from The Nature Conservancy outlined their water-markets impact-investment schemes, and Cullen Gunn from Kilter Rural described working examples of landscape improvement projects that deliver better environments AND better returns to investors.

This is a hard and long road, but one that is ultimately more financially sustainable than short term grants from governments or philanthropy. So here is the challenge – can NESP researchers come up with threatened species recovery projects that can help save species AND deliver financial returns to land owners or investors? Creative conservationists like Mt Rothwell owner Nigel Sharp, National Australia Bank, and big companies like Ferrero Rocher all tell me they’re interested and investors are out there. So if you have a good idea, please get in contact!

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