SCIENCESCOPE

edited by RICHARD STONE

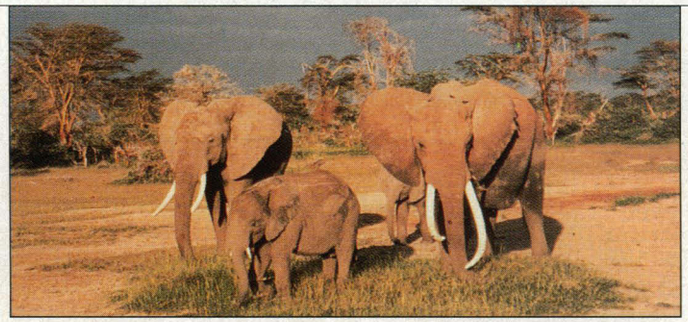
Scientists Clash Over Wildlife Trade Treaty

Ocean breezes may not be enough to cool a debate set to begin next week in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where scientists and diplomats from 122 nations will discuss criteria for classifying a species as endangered.

At issue are guidelines for implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the 21-year-old treaty that regulates commerce in rare animals and plants. Delegates must decide whether to scrap the treaty's current guidelines for species protection in favor of more scientific criteria, including numbers above which species can be hunted for trade.

The dispute began at the 1992 CITES meeting in Japan, where several African countries lobbied for approval to take flourishing elephant populations off the treaty's protected list and use profits from the sale of hides to support conservation efforts. In response, a CITES scientific panel has developed definitions of risk and tentative "safe" population numbers. For example, a wild population of less than 5000 mature animals could qualify as endangered if it were projected to decline by more than 20% in 10 years, or if its subpopulations had fewer than 500 members.

But the proposal faces opposition from the United States. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service analyzes such factors as habitat loss and breeding success, using population size only when robust numbers are available. Among the species that could be removed from the protected list if numerical guidelines were adopted are the Costa Rican orchid and Africa's leopard.



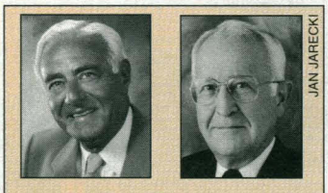
M. WESTERVELT/U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Numbers game. Should precise numbers of a species, like these African elephants, be used to decide whether it would be endangered by trade?

NAE Faces Battle For Presidency

The fight over control of Congress isn't the only election battle brewing in Washington. This winter the 1700 members of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) will have a rare opportunity to choose between two men who want to succeed Robert White as NAE president.

Last month the NAE announced that Cornelius Pings, now president of the Association of American Universities, had been approved by the academy's council as the nominee for a 6-year term beginning on 1 July. What the press release didn't say—and could ignore because it's not official—is that another member who collected 42% of the vote in 1991 against White is planning to run again. But Harold Liebowitz, a professor of engineering at George Washington University, must do it the hard way—as a write-in candidate who has collected signatures from at least 5% of the membership. Liebowitz's expected candidacy was first reported in the 15 September issue of *Science & Government Report*.



JAN JARECKI

Engine of change? Liebowitz *(left)* takes on Pings.

Pings says he would change "nothing major" about what he calls "a strong, vital organization." But Liebowitz says he wants NAE to "play a much more active role" in influencing federal technology policy. He also wants to give members a choice. "There shouldn't be a little group deciding [who the next president will be]," he says. Liebowitz has until 15 January to submit his petition.

Cresson to Lead EU Research Effort

Europe's research chiefs are preparing for even closer cooperation with industry following the announcement last weekend that former French Prime Minister Edith Cresson will become the European Union's (EU's) commissioner for research. Cresson is due to take over at the end of this year when Italian systems engineer Antonio Ruberti steps down after 2 years on the job.

Although industry-related programs have always dominated the EU's agenda, academics who now benefit from EU research grants fear that Cresson will accelerate that trend. Cresson, a career politician, has long championed interventionist industrial policies. In contrast, Ruberti, a former rector of Rome's La Sapienza University, has won praise for raising the profile of basic science. "I've been very impressed," says Cambridge University pharmacologist Arnold Burgen, who stepped down in June as president of the pan-European academy Academia Europaea. One of Ruberti's most popular steps was the creation of a scientific advisory body, the 100-member European Science and Technology Assembly (*Science*, 1 April, p. 19).

The EU's next 5-year research budget is expected to be put in place before Ruberti leaves. That means Cresson may have to wait to make her mark until 1996, when EU's member states must decide whether to add some $890 million to the union's research budget.

Congress Asks for Study of R&D Spending

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is gearing up for yet another study of how the government should carve up the federal science pie. Yet to be decided, however, is whether the $750,000 inquiry will spell out which disciplines should get served first.

In September, Congress added a clause to a funding bill asking for a study of "the appropriate allocation of funds to R&D activities, the appropriate balance among the different institutions that conduct such research, and the means of assuring continued objectivity in the allocation process." A staffer for Senator Tom Harkin (D–IA), who chairs the panel that proposed the study, says Congress is looking for the best way to spend what is likely to be, at most, a "2% or 3% annual increase" for science. "We don't want a study that says 'The answer is more money.' But we do want a way to compare what each federal agency is spending, and a way to incorporate that assessment into the budget process." Given Harkin's double role as chair of the subcommittee that funds the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and enthusiastic supporter of biomedical research, it's a safe bet the committee wouldn't mind hearing that biomedical research is underfunded.

But that conclusion's not in the cards, says the panel's chair, former NAS President Frank Press. "They want a document to help them decide what level of spending is enough for science," says Press. "We'll probably talk about the strategic and intellectual role of science in society, but we're not going to compare individual disciplines."

Press says a tight deadline—31 December 1995—will require panelists willing to put in "more than the usual amount of time." NAS plans to name a 15-member group later this month and hold a series of regional meetings to get input from the community.