

From the Editor

Despite the best efforts of my teachers, I never really got to grips with chemistry at school. The periodic table, which we were expected to learn in its entirety, was as unintelligible to me as a wall of Egyptian hieroglyphs. No surprise then, that when I came across the element tantalum recently, it was the first time I'd heard of it.

Sitting inconspicuously at position number 73 in the periodic table, tantalum is notable for its ability to hold high electrical charges, making it a vital component of mobile phones, laptop computers, pagers and lots of other electronic devices. So what's this got to do with conservation? Well, tantalum is refined from an ore called coltan and coltan is found in huge quantities in the forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, home to Okapi, Bonobo and a myriad of other species.

With the boom in electronics and mobile phones in particular, demand for coltan has increased exponentially, resulting in a 'gold rush' style invasion of the Congo forests. There is evidence from a United Nations Security Council Report that smuggling of coltan from the Congo is generating tens of millions of dollars' worth of revenue, much of it seemingly invested in arms to sustain the warfare ravaging that country.

Of course, the situation is much more complex, but I offer the above summary as an introduction to Marcel Enckoto's article, 'Conservation in the Face of Armed Conflict', which gives an insight into the sometimes brutal realities facing conservationists and conservation educators in the field.

Bringing people face to face with environmental issues and exploring ways of dealing with them is, of course, what we are all about. In this issue of our Journal, colleagues from all over the world share very different experiences of 'getting the message over'. Whether using state-of-the-art computer technology or drama and storytelling, the common thread running through all of this collective wisdom has to be effective communication with all our audiences. In that respect a comment made by Albert Einstein came to mind while I was reading an unnecessarily complicated information panel in a museum recently - 'If you can't explain something to a six-year-old, you really don't understand it yourself.' I'm not sure how $E=mc^2$ fits into that way of thinking but it makes you pause for thought!

No doubt many of you will be getting ready to attend autumn zoo educator conferences in your region so now is a good time to remind you to start lobbying your directors for funding to attend next year's IZE Conference at Ocean Park, Hong Kong. Suzanne Gendron gives further details on page 28.

Still on the subject of money, Gerda Vest Hansen will be asking for your annual subscriptions early in the new year. We would ask you, if your institution can afford it, to seriously consider taking out institutional membership. The extra revenue this generates is ploughed into assisting educators who would otherwise be unable to afford it, to attend our conferences.

I hope you enjoy this issue of our Journal and find it useful. Please keep articles coming in to our regional editors as we are already planning the next issue!

Stephen McKeown