

There is little doubt that, as we enter 2009, the greatest concern for most of us is the current economic situation described it seems to me by politicians in power as the 'economic downturn' and those not in power (and the media) as the 'global financial meltdown'. I am sure this is affecting all of us as zoo educators in many different ways as budgets are squeezed and projects deferred and the uncertainty of what lies ahead makes it hard to remain optimistic. However, one might argue that in a sense our jobs are made easier as people reflect on their lifestyles and look at ways of saving money. In many instances money saving ideas have a positive impact on the environment and raise people's awareness of the environmental cost of going abroad for a holiday, leaving the TV on standby, driving to the shops etc. I recently invested in an energy monitor for the house – an amazing little device that shows in real time how much I am spending on electricity at that moment. Some revelations about the cost of running various devices around the house have resulted in projected electricity savings of around \$600 during 2009 and the satisfaction of knowing I have correspondingly reduced my carbon footprint. Much as someone on a diet can recite the calorific content of food items, I happily bore people with the running costs of everything from domestic refrigerators (\$180 a year) to doing a wash at 60°C (c \$1.00). My real point is that the economic situation will have sensitised people to our messages in a way that makes positive actions more likely and so what seems like a threat initially can be turned into an opportunity.

12 February 2009 is the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin and many zoos in the UK are participating in the national celebrations. Darwin's theory 'On the Origin of Species', though widely accepted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century nevertheless continues to stimulate healthy debate 150 years after its publication. Darwin was a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London and it is documented that his observations of animals in London Zoo helped form his thinking on evolutionary theory. The value of zoos as a scientific resource is to my mind understated and perhaps as educators we need to reevaluate this important aspect of our function and look at ways of making our audiences more appreciative of it.

2009 for IZE sees the introduction of a tiered membership fee system where, depending on where you live in the world, you will pay more or less for IZE membership. This was approved by the General Assembly at the IZE Conference in Adelaide last October and is, we feel, a very fair way of doing things while potentially boosting membership numbers.

At the end of 2008, Peter Dollinger, WAZA Director retired from his position to make way for Gerald Dick. Peter has been a good friend of IZE over the years and has done much work on our behalf for which we are very grateful. We wish him well in what looks to me like being a very active retirement! Gerald I know is equally supportive of our work and we are already discussing a number of initiatives which will cement the bonds between our two organizations.

Finally, on behalf of the IZE Board, may I wish you all the very best for the coming year in the hope that by the end of it we will be through the worst of the economic situation and looking forward to 2010 – our conference year in Disney's Animal Kingdom, Florida!

Kind regards,

Stephen