

A Guide to Creating and Managing Specialist Group Listservs and Websites

IUCN/SSC has the facility to host a website for all SSC Specialist Groups and task Forces within the SSC domain, with the provision that Groups are responsible for managing and updating their own sites. For those Groups that do not yet have a web presence, the communications officers can help you create a homepage, with the expectation that this can be developed into a full website when the time allows.

Similarly, IUCN/SSC can also host a listserv for all Groups that are interested.

Specialist Group listservs

What is a Listserv?

A listserv or electronic mailing list is an automated service which re-distributes email messages from one member of a List to all the other members, and does the same with any replies to the original message, tracking responses according to the Subject line of the original posting (message). Because it relies solely on the use of email, it can be used worldwide with a wide variety of email services and client programs. Listservs are extremely useful for collaborative project work, for distribution of information and/or files and documents, or for announcements to a large group of people with email addresses.

Listsers also keep automatically an archive of all messages, which may be retrieved by email or viewed using a web browser.

Listsers are generally one of the following three types:

- Open - anyone with an email address may "subscribe to" or join the list.
- Closed/Private: - members are added by invitation or by the owner(s) or by current members of the list.
- Broadcast/One-Way: These may be public or private, but messages are only broadcast to the list members; no reply to the list is allowed. Such lists are normally used for announcements, press releases, e-zines (email magazines, etc.)

Listsers are a lot like any other discussion or working group: the more focused they are, with clearly-stated purposes and goals, and with positive, even-handed moderators, leaders or owners, the more constructive the results. Many people are still new to mailing lists, and are unsure whether they are expected to sit back and await instructions, or whether they can go ahead and participate, post messages, contribute; they may also be uncertain about some of the basic "netiquette" (acceptable email or Internet behavior). It is always worth keeping this in mind when setting up a list, and making some allowance for it in the first

days and weeks; some investment of your time and effort up front can pay off in constructive results down the line. Your initial "welcome" message should cover these topics thoroughly. Every listserv supported by IUCN must have a minimum of two "owners", for those times when one or the other absent.

For further information, or if you wish to set up a listserv for your group, contact the [webweaver](#).

Specialist Group websites

Getting started

Once you decide to host your website on the IUCN/SSC server, IUCN's Information Management Group will set up a dedicated folder for your group and issue you with a password. You will have complete rights within your folder to add or remove files and folders.

Some basic rules:

- Do not use Microsoft Frontpage as an editor;
- Do not use ASP;
- Use file names that are less than 30 characters; and
- The top page in each folder should be called index.html.

We suggest HTML editors such as: (most of these include built-in file transfer protocol or FTP connectivity and site management):

- **Windows:**
 - Basic:
 - Netscape Publisher
 - Advanced:
 - Macromedia Dreamweaver
 - Macromedia Studio MX
 - Adobe GoLive
- **Macintosh:**
 - Basic:
 - Webspinner
 - Advanced:
 - Adobe Golive
 - Macromedia Dreamweaver
 - Macromedia Studio MX
 - BBEedit

Image software:

- **Windows:**

- Macromedia Fireworks
- Paint Shop Pro
- Photoshop Elements (\$100)
- Photoshop
- Ulead
- **Macintosh:**
 - Macromedia Fireworks
 - Photoshop Elements (\$100)
 - Photoshop

Note that your folder is "live" on the IUCN public webserver, so when you have uploaded pages and made a link to them, they will immediately be visible to the public. Once you have uploaded pages and are satisfied with them, notify the SSC [webweaver](#) to make a link to your site.

Tips for a successful website

Many people who create websites wonder why they have so few visitors and rank so low on search engines (e.g., Google, AltVista, etc.). Following is a series of tips on what you can do to run a successful site (both in terms of visitor numbers or hits, and visitor satisfaction). The tips apply to these five key areas of website design and maintenance:

- Interesting content
- Use of text
- Clean and simple design
- Easy user navigation
- Easy search engine indexing

Please note: many of these tips appear quite technical, but with a little practice it will all make sense. Try to design and build your website using the code function as much as possible, as this allows for finer detailing and, after the initial hurdles, much less frustration.

Internet addresses and webspace

Although the IUCN/SSC has the facility to host Specialist Group websites, this is done within the SSC domain

http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/sgs/specialist_group_name/into.htm and only up to a maximum size limit of 100 MB. It is therefore strongly encouraged that Groups with larger websites obtain an alternative host.

If you decide to use a free webspace provider, be aware of the amount of third party advertisements that will accompany your site. A better solution would be to pay for something that is ad-free - this will also allow you to choose a simple

Internet address which is easy to remember as not all people keep extensive bookmark lists (e.g., http://www.specialist_group_name.net/).

Path and directory names

Observe the "Three Click Rule" - ensure that the visitor only has to navigate through a maximum of three pages to get to the final destination. This includes keeping HTML files close to the root http://www.specialist_group_name.net/ as search engines occasionally "punish" links that are buried deep in the directory tree.

Once you're using a specific file or directory name, don't change it again. Very few people will make the necessary effort to find a page once it's been moved. Alternatively, use the re-redirect function (code below) that automatically transfers the visitor to the new location (contact the [webweaver](#) if you need help with this).

```
<HEAD>
<TITLE>Page Moved</TITLE>
<META HTTP-EQUIV="refresh"
CONTENT="0;URL=insert_file_name_here.extension">
<style type="text/css">
<!--
.style1 {
font-family: Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif;
font-size: 12px;
}
-->
</style>
</HEAD>
<BODY>
<span class="style1">Sorry, this page has moved. You will be automatically sent
to the new location shortly. If you aren't forwarded to the page, click the following
<a href="insert_file_name_here.extension">link</a>.
</span>
</BODY>
```

When creating pages, give your files and directories names that contain full key words important for that page. Instead of abbreviating words, rather use a hyphen (this will ensure that the file name is read as separate words), e.g., [monkey-links.html](#) vs. [mnklnks.html](#).

Furthermore, don't use special characters, letters with accents or spaces in file names. Keep to the 26 lower case letters "a" to "z", the ten digits "0" to "9", the dash "-", and one dot "." to separate file extensions.

Links

Create extensive links between the pages of your site to promote easy navigation. Ask people and organisations managing web pages related to yours to add your address to their site (tell them what text you would prefer to have shown as a link). Offer to link to their site in return.

Content

If your page is not interesting, it will not draw visitors. Websites need to be more than just a list of links and contact details. The more work you put into your pages, the more useful they will be to others. Specialist Group websites that feature a photo gallery, information on the Group's flagship species, summaries of on-the-ground conservation projects etc., all prove popular.

Avoid duplicate pages. If you have equal or similar pages on different domains, search engines (especially Google) will remove you from their database. Check your site regularly for broken links.

Use small image files of lower resolution wherever possible. To display larger image files, rather link from a thumbnail version of it (remember to mention the size of the image in KB). Make sure you have permission to use all photos posted on your site.

Regarding image file formats: use JPEG for photographs, GIF or PNG for graphics. Don't use animated GIFS, BMP or TIFF. Don't use fancy new file formats as (a) people don't like to install new plugins, (b) their systems cannot install the new plugins, or (c) the new plugin is not available for all operating systems or browsers.

Only use content (images, text, videos, music, etc.) that has been created by your Group or that carries explicit permission.

Finally, use a spell-checker! Have someone else check your texts for grammar and typographical errors.

Navigation

Most people don't visit a website via the homepage. They usually enter via search engine query results - so make sure that it is easy to navigate to your home page from all the pages in your site. Visitors also expect a menu either at the top or on the side of the page.

Steer clear of using frames for the following three main reasons:

1. Bookmarking a specific page in a framed website is not possible;

2. Most browsers (Netscape, Internet Explorer, etc.) cannot print framed pages properly; and
3. Search engines seem to have problems with frames because they are unsure as to what information to include as navigation units in their index.

Contact information - create a separate webpage for your contact information and link to it from every other page. A good idea is to offer an email form on that page too (with just a text field and a "send" button).

Sitemaps are extremely useful.

Layout

Use CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) for layout issues (font attributes). With CSS all layout changes are made in one place (namely, the style sheet file) and this will take effect for the entire site. Don't mix too many font sizes, colours, or types.

Try to keep to certain standards when it comes to arranging the elements of your page, i.e., place a menu on the top or left hand side; and a footer with site map, contact details, etc. at the bottom. A three column layout usually works best for sites where a lot of information needs to be displayed on the same page. Better yet, create a template which can then be applied to the entire site.

Don't use music (*.mid) or sampled sounds (*.wav, *.mp3) on your pages unless absolutely essential. Rather allow the visitor to turn the music on and off themselves, and make sure it is clear how to turn it off. Don't use pop-up windows because as most pop-ups contain unwanted advertisements, people turn them off. Rather create normal links into new pages that the user can click themselves. Finally, don't use blinking or animated text. All the above (music, pop-ups, animated text), as well as large images and java applets, take up too much bandwidth on your hosting server.

Always add captions and credit information for photos using the alt attributes of the image properties.

Make sure that your link text differs from the rest of your text; this is best done by underlining or using a different text colour - be consistent throughout your site.

Structure the text in your pages through the use of headings, paragraphs, bullet points and tables. Also, rather than having pages that are too long, split the information over several pages.

Search engines

Submit your site to the major search engines, and give them time to update their index with your webpage address. Do not re-submit until after several months

and, when you do, only submit the top page (the rest will be included automatically). Alternatively, submit your sitemap that contains the links to all your pages.

Log files

Get the log files of your site as they contain valuable visitor information about: what pages were visited and how often, where did the visitors come from, what browsers they're using, etc. Log analysis tools (downloadable from the Internet) will help you to get the information that you need from the files. An example of the usefulness of log files is knowing which keywords were used to find your site. Remember: The keywords that potential visitors use to describe your site are far more important than those which you use to describe your site, even though your description may be more accurate.