

Interview:

Durrell - Nature's Louvre

Name: Professor John E. Fa

Title: Director of Conservation Science

Joined Durrell in: 1992

"We are picking out the Mona Lisas of the natural world, the really outstanding masterpieces of nature", explains John Fa, Director of Conservation Science at the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust. "The message that we would like you to take away", he continues, "is that preserving rarity is as important as having masterpieces like the Mona Lisa in museums".

TopSpots, Durrell's latest scientific accomplishment identifies the 200 most important "natural museums" in most urgent need of attention and is a significant step in this direction. "By creating a prioritisation system for the organisation, allowing us to pick out the key endemism centres in the world, places that represent unique habitats in the world containing rare species, we are able to become far more focused and better at putting the little resources we have to the best use", explains John Fa.

TopSpots is a great scientific achievement for Durrell and a sign of the transformation Durrell, as an organisation, has gone through in recent years, today ranking it as a respected scientific organisation as well as a conservation centre. "It is important to realise how Durrell has changed, but also how the science of conservation has changed. We are very active in pushing the frontiers of science in terms of doing the conservation work that we want to do, and *TopSpots* has given us a focus, a clear strategy."

The significance of biodiversity is still not fully appreciated by the public, argues Fa. "The importance of biodiversity, the conservation of species throughout the world", he explains, "is fundamental to our livelihoods and survival. As people, we all depend on the use of natural products but at the same time we wouldn't like to see a world that is stripped bare and uniform. Our work is to preserve the rare, because if we don't take care of the world now, what is common today will be rare tomorrow. Through our work we want to maintain a world with more butterflies, more birds, whilst at the same time preserving the things that are fundamental to our lives and to the livelihoods of many people. All our projects are dealing with issues that have to do

with livelihoods. We are interested in people as much as we are in biodiversity”, he explains.

John Fa is a scientist at heart, but the wider implications of Durrell’s work are very much at the forefront of his work and ethos. “Without conservation and the preservation of the ecosystem services and species webs, we risk the collapse of the world as we know it”, he says. “Essentially we risk waking up in 100 years in a world of grey, unimaginative communities of animals and plants, essentially run by one or two prolific species, a world overrun by black rats and cockroaches, with grey skies and nothing more”.