

Cave Animal of the Year

Should Australia consider adopting this concept?

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Abstract

The concept of Cave Animal of the Year was conceived by members of the Swiss, Austrian and German Speleological Federations in 2009. The concept is used to raise conservation awareness, as conservation of habitats are based primarily on biological aspects. It is firmly believed that this concept should be adopted by Australia and/or New Zealand to aid in the promotion of caves, karst and their conservation through the raising of public awareness. Minimal direct cash resources are believed to be required to implement the program of Cave Animal of the Year. The development of a logo and website are the immediate priorities. Additional funds would allow for printing of promotional posters, leaflets and other support material. It is anticipated that additional sponsorships could be obtained through time from various more broad based conservation organisations or sympathetic commercial organisations.

The choice of animal for the Cave Animal of the Year campaign requires some careful consideration. It needs to be easily available to be photographed so as to enable enough images for the running of a publicity campaign. The authors are considering the Tasmanian Cave Spider *Hickmania troglodytes* as the inaugural Cave Animal of the Year in order to create synergies with the Sixteen Legs program being run by Dr Niall Doran and the Bookend Trust if this is agreeable to all parties. The implementation of the Cave Animal of the Year will require the launch of the website, followed by the release of promotional material to various educational institutions. The authors would seek to announce the first Australian Cave Animal of the Year 2017 in December 2016. This would be accompanied by the launch of the website, and followed up with a presentation on the program at the International Congress of Speleology in 2017.

Introduction

The concept of Cave Animal of the Year was conceived by members of the Swiss, Austrian and German Speleological Federations in 2009 following on from the concept first used in 1971 for Bird of the Year, and quickly adopted for over 40 different

species and habitats across Germany and other countries (Vogel *et al.*, 2013). The concept is used to raise conservation awareness, as conservation of habitats are based primarily on biological aspects. The first German “Cave Animal of the Year” was the genus *Niphargus*, and was chosen as it represents a true Troglobiont that is colourless, without eyes, an interesting type of movement and a photogenic appearance.

The German Experience

Since 2009 a series of prominent and easily seen cave animals have been chosen by the German Speleological Federation including the Herald Moth *Scoliopteryx libatrix* (2010), the bat *Myotis myotis* was chosen in 2011 to coincide with the international Year of Bats, and the Large Cave Spider *Meta menardi* (2012). The Germans have used a website linked to all national “Nature of the Year” pages. The concept includes information on life history, ecology and the geographical distribution for each particular animal is available. Subterranean ecosystems, cave protection and biospeleology are explained as well as a call for action. The website includes posters and flyers available for download. The committee also produces a press release including photographs. Printed versions are offered to all German show caves (Vogel *et al.*, 2013). The campaign also includes learning and training workshops for the determination of common cave species with a special focus on the EU Flora-Fauna-Habitats

Over the years, the interest of the media in the Cave Animal of the Year in Germany has greatly increased with wide-spread media coverage. In 2012, the homepage of the Cave Animal of the Year received on average 250 hits per week. 9,000 flyers and 250 posters were distributed (Vogel *et al.*, 2013).

In 2011, the first European Cave Animal of the Year was declared and Vogel *et al.* (2013) believed that if other speleological federations are developing interest in the campaign, a worldwide initiative should be conceivable. Another easy way to create public awareness could be to declare an “Endangered Cave of the Month/Year” on national and international websites to raise awareness of a particular cave that may be in danger of damage or destruction. Effective

public relation work for the benefit of cave protection should be based on the slogan “Acting local, thinking global and cooperate over borders!” (Vogel *et al.*, 2013).

Should Australia and/or New Zealand adopt this concept?

The concept of Cave Animal of the Year raised particular interest from two ACKMA members when they attended the presentation by Vogel *et al.* (2013) at the International Congress of Speleology at Brno, Czech Republic in 2013. The idea was raised by Cathie Plowman to present discussion papers at the 2015 ACKMA conference to gauge the interest and level of support for such a concept in Australia and/or New Zealand. The authors firmly believe that the concept has merit in the promotion of caves and karst conservation through the raising of public awareness. After feedback from ACKMA and subsequently ASF Conference delegates the authors have concluded that the concept be kept separate for each particular country to simply the choice of animal, due to the general lack of common species between Australia and New Zealand. The promotion of the Cave Animal of the Year should also be kept separate from being directly part of either ACKMA or ASF but be aligned with the values of both organisations to promote the conservation of caves and their fauna.

Logistics and support

Minimal direct cash resources are believed to be required to implement the program of Cave Animal of the Year, but support could be obtained from ACKMA and ASF as part of conservation grant programs to allow for the cost of website hosting, printing of promotional posters, leaflets and other support material. It is anticipated that additional sponsorships could be obtained through time from various more broad based conservation organisations or sympathetic commercial organisations. The development of a logo and website are the immediate priorities. A list of potential sponsors has also been developed for future support.

Choosing an animal

The choice of animal for the Cave Animal of the Year campaign requires some careful consideration. It needs to be easily available to be photographed so as to enable enough images for the running of a publicity campaign. The species or genus must also have some pre-existing information regarding its biology, ecology and distribution as otherwise it becomes difficult to provide meaningful pamphlets or posters to the public.

The authors were inspired by the Sixteen Legs presentation by Dr Niall Doran and the Bookend Trust with regards to the level of knowledge and background that they have obtained during their filming of the Tasmanian Cave spider *Hickmania troglodytes*. If it is agreeable to both Niall and the Bookend Trust then this would be a natural choice for the inaugural Cave Animal of the Year for Australia as it is large, easily photographed, is reasonably well known biologically compared with most cave invertebrates and is about to be the subject of a large publicity campaign as part of the Sixteen Legs film.

Implementation

The implementation of the Cave Animal of the Year will require the launch of the website, followed by the release of promotional material to various educational institutions. The organisers for Cave Animal of the Year would be required to prepare materials such as note sheets, photos, A4 size posters for e-distribution and develop a database of organisations that this material is sent to. The authors would envisage a set of promotional material being prepared to allow the concept to be incorporated into state natural history museum public education programs, selected schools and not for profit conservation organisations. We would seek that these organisations would provide website links to the Cave Animal of the Year website.

The website and choice of cave animal could also be linked to other conservation awareness programs such as the more broadly known Year of fauna/flora/habitats already in existence.

The authors would seek to announce the first Australian Cave Animal of the Year 2017 in December 2016. This would be accompanied by the launch of the website, and followed up with a presentation on the program at the International Congress of Speleology in 2017.

Conclusion

The authors firmly believe that the concept of Cave Animal of the Year should be implemented in Australia, and plan to pursue this to have the inaugural launch in 2017 to coincide with the UIS International Congress of Speleology in Sydney.

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References

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