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or evaporite rocks. Whilst caves and karst may have been significant features when some of them were designated, in others managers may not be aware of the importance and vulnerability of caves and karst or even of the extent of karst within their PA. Hence, a future objective of the CKWG should be to promote links with those involved in managing sites on the four databases. A first step in this direction is to welcome the formation of the CaveMAB Network which focuses on Caves and Karst in UNESCO Biosphere Reserves. Details follow George's message.

The final section of the Newsletter provides news of the newly published IUCN Guidelines on Geoconservation in Protected and Conserved Areas and provides an update on progress with one of its other primary objective, producing revised Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection.

Welcome to the International Year of Caves and Karst by George Veni

For the first time in history, the global speleological community is united in 2021 in one grand project, the International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK). The main goal of the IYCK is to teach the world about the many benefits of caves and karst. As I write these words, the International Union of Speleology (UIS) and its 55 member countries are joined by 84 international and national organizations as partners, and more organizations have told me they are planning to join. Several of these partners are not cave organizations, which is a success in itself. Their alliance with the UIS proves that the IYCK is seen as broadly important, and not limited to speleologists.

The greatest alliance came in September, when the UIS was invited by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to hold the Opening Ceremony of the IYCK at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. Speleology has never had such a high international stage to reach large numbers of influential national ambassadors and their governments and show them how very important caves and karst are to their countries.

Yet despite this success in partners, we are challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Soon after we received the UNESCO invitation, Paris was declared a COVID “red zone” and now, as 2021 begins, the situation in Paris and everywhere is worse. The Opening Ceremony will be held virtually on 26 January 2021. Watch the IYCK website (www.uis-speleo.org) and UIS Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/uisspeleo>) for announcements about all IYCK events. The UIS is now working with UNESCO to schedule an IYCK celebration sometime later in 2021 as allowed by the virus.

Over the next few weeks, we will be holding a series of virtual activities to celebrate the start of the IYCK. The UIS is working with UNESCO to schedule an IYCK celebration sometime later in 2021 as allowed by the virus.

Work with partners. Several of the steps above involve developing partnerships for the IYCK. Think about other partners who can join you. Of course, you will first think about speleological organizations, but then contact groups that are not involved with caves. Remember that we need to teach others about caves, so tell your local hiking, climbing, water protection, nature, archaeological, or other groups that their area has caves or is karst. Join their virtual meetings and give presentations. Help change them from groups that only use the karst to groups that understand and protect it.

Create virtual conferences. Conferences are usually for specialists, not the general public. If you organize a virtual conference, invite some of the people mentioned above, such as lawmakers, land managers, and others whose work affects caves and karst, but who do not understand it. Give them free registrations to the conference so they can learn and create partnerships. They probably would not join the conference if they had to pay, but their attendance at a virtual conference will cost you nothing but may gain you a lot.

Be creative. You are not limited to the ideas in this guide. Think of other ideas that can engage the public during the pandemic, such as art, video, and music contests for caves and karst. Create fun programs for young people on Tik Tok, Instagram, and other social media. If you are at a university, company, or organization with its own magazine and social media, send articles for posting about your cave and karst work. It will benefit the IYCK and will be good for your career. There are many other creative possibilities.

Post your activities to the IYCK website. It is important that you announce your events, no matter how small, on the Events page of the website. Use the Contact Us page

CaveMAB #TogetherForCaves

CaveMAB is an informal network of biosphere reserves around the globe that treasure natural and cultural phenomena related to caves. This network is multidisciplinary and addresses the similar challenges we all face, whether social, educational, cultural, or scientific, in protecting the biodiversity of the unique cave and karst environments within the MAB program. In 2021, CaveMAB is hosting an outreach campaign to promote the understanding, exploration, and protection of the biodiversity of cave and karst environments through sustainable actions. We believe that we are stronger together and invite your biosphere reserve to join the network as well as participate in on-going collaborative projects. Specifically, we are putting together a short video highlighting cave and karst biosphere reserves and would like to see places and faces from across the globe. You can find more information about the network at cavemab.com or feel free to contact one of the network coordinators listed below.

Clayton Lino, Mata Atlantica Biosphere Reserve, Brazil, claytonflino@gmail.com

Darja Kranjc, Karst and Reka River Biosphere Reserve, Slovenia, darja.kranjc@psj.gov.si

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Guidelines for Geoconservation in Protected and Conserved Areas

As many of you will already know the IUCN Guidelines for Geoconservation in Protected and

Progress with Revision of IUCN Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection

The Geoconservation BPG is a very important document and the section on caves and karst will provide useful information for PA managers. However, there is still a need for more detailed and targeted guidance that addresses conservation of both earth science and biological features in cave and karst areas. The CKWG is aiming to provide this advice by updating the *IUCN Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection* which were published in 1997. This project is being undertaken with support from the International Union of Speleology as a contribution to IYCK. The aim is to have a digital publication ready for the UIS Congress in July 2021 and to subsequently approach IUCN-WCPA to seek their endorsement.

David Gillieson & John Gunn are editing the document and so far material for the sections on What is karst?; Some values of karst and caves; The special nature of karst environments and cave systems; Scales of management in karst areas and Forestry and agriculture have been received and edited. Lead authors have been identified for the sections on Scientific research; Extractive industries; Water supply; Sustainable use and occupation of karst; Traditional or indigenous use of caves and Developing effective monitoring and mitigation. However, there are three sections for which no lead author has so far been identified: Recreational and adventure caving; Tourism: