



L'ENSEIGNEMENT

Professor Bill Adams, New Holder of the Claudio Segré Chair of Conservation and Development

Professor Adams will join the Graduate Institute in January 2021.

What did you gain from your experience as Moran Professor of Conservation and Development at the University of Cambridge?

I was appointed to the Department of Geography at Cambridge in 1984, and have been privileged to see many changes in the university and in my areas of research. Geography has been an excellent home for work on sustainable development and conservation, because it is so interdisciplinary. I have had colleagues who work on the physical and biological science of global environmental change, and others who work on the social science of development and poverty, and in the environmental humanities. This has been both challenging and rewarding: no research literature is out of bounds, and ideas and research findings are sure to have a lively reception. Cambridge also attracts excellent students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and it has been a privilege to meet and teach them.

My own research on environment and development has focused on both Europe and tropical Africa. I tend to approach my research from the perspectives of environmental history (the evolution of thinking about sustainability and wildlife conservation, for example) and political ecology (for example the social impacts of development

and conservation projects, or the particular challenges of reducing human-elephant conflict).

You will join the Institute next January as the holder of the Claudio Segré Chair of Conservation and Development. What led you to accept this position?

The Graduate Institute is a unique organisation. I am excited by its international reach, especially into the transnational institutions based in Geneva, and also the community of students and scholars that it attracts. I have been fortunate to work in a strong research university in Cambridge, and have enjoyed some opportunities to take research ideas out into the wider world, for example through the Cambridge Conservation Research Institute, and through my work with the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. I am looking forward to learning more of this world, and contributing to it, through the Graduate Institute. The task of making ideas and knowledge relevant is extremely important given the challenges that face the international community (and national governments) at the present time.

More specifically, what are the challenges for biodiversity, and why are they so important?

Biodiversity loss is one of the critical challenges of the Anthropocene, alongside climate change. Globally, huge efforts go into the protection of nature, yet biodiversity loss continues. This presents a huge challenge, both for policy,

but also for researchers who wish their work to be relevant to the difficult choices humanity faces in the 21st century. We all depend on nature in ways that we do not fully appreciate, whether we think in terms of the loss of rare species and natural beauty, or the dependence of human communities on living resources. A key challenge is to break down barriers between different academic disciplines so that those taking policy decisions understand both the natural environment and human society, and to open up better communication between citizens, government and businesses. Too often, decisions about nature and economic development are made without sufficient input from local people. Those trained in the natural sciences are often at odds with social scientists talking about issues of economy and justice. Decision-makers need to be equipped to integrate both of these dimensions, and to be open to voices from the ground.

So, development and biodiversity should go hand in hand?

Biodiversity and development are often treated as separate issues, and this is disastrously inefficient. Societies and economies sit within and depend on the living biosphere, even if the way we conventionally account for nature in our thinking about human futures pretends that it is somehow an "optional extra". Many rural communities depend directly on ecosystem resources for livelihoods, but no society is independent of the natural world – the commerce chains that supply us with everything, from our morning coffee to our seafood dinner, depend on natural living systems, as do the environments where people live and (for those able to) take their holidays. Good development planning needs the state of nature at its heart, and conservation planning must integrate human well-being, whether in Switzerland or the Sahara.

It is a mistake to think that we can trade off economic development and the state of the world's biodiversity: we need wealth, justice, human welfare and a biodiverse Earth to be achieved together. This is possible, but not easy. Quite a lot of things we do now are going to need to change if we are to finish the 21st century with an Earth that resembles the one we started with, and one that makes a human home that feels good to live in.

What are your main objectives as chair holder?

As holder of the Claudio Segré Chair of Conservation and Development I will be developing my research on landscape scale conservation and on novel conservation technologies (I have a co-authored book coming out in 2021 with Yale University Press on synthetic biology and conservation). I also look forward to meeting and working with the students in the Institute. In addition, I am excited by the prospect of meeting people across the community in the Geneva area interested in conservation and development. I plan to continue working to help build a world that is biologically diverse and meets all human needs.

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L'Institut a le plaisir d'annoncer la création de la chaire Claudio Segré « Conservation et développement ». La Fondation Segré, créée en 1996 par Claudio Segré, un ami de longue date de l'Institut, finance depuis plusieurs années un poste de *Distinguished Visiting Professor* occupé par Tim Flannery, scientifique australien de renom, qui travaille en particulier sur le changement climatique.

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