PART V

THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATION GENETICS

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ES: Actually, I can make that five minutes up right now. I had a five-minute speech prepared, but I can really get it down to two sentences. I have a lot of practice at this, following after these scientists. (Laughter)

In this afternoon s session we re going to be looking to the future of conservation genetics. And, as you might have noticed, we ve really emphasized extracting overarching themes, rather than focusing on case studies throughout the symposium. We ve also tried very hard to make sure we had conflicting or alternative viewpoints encapsulated in the panels. And, in fact, somebody came up to me and said: Did you expect this much disagreement? And the answer to that question is: We *wanted* this much discussion on the perspectives. Because we feel it s important for us to be able to learn from that.

During the next session we have the opportunity to review the lessons that we ve been thinking about for the last couple of days, learn from the first 15 years of this discipline, and to look to the future. Which I feel it s a soul-searching operation, for a number of reasons. Mary Ashley mentioned yesterday that for those of us who care about the environment, we try to figure out ways for our work to be meaningful. And sometimes we may be stretching the meaningfulness of our work to mesh with our personal views on what should be done in the world to conserve biodiversity.

And I think this is a moment where we need to think about the techniques that we ve developed, and think about what we ve learned thus far in conservation genetics and really focus in on the efforts that will have the most direct application. Partly because this is a crisis discipline, as everyone always says. We re making decisions or the speed at which we can make decisions is not at all in mesh with, unfortunately, the speed at which we can do science. And funding is limited, and we always have to set priorities. So our speakers this afternoon have been charged with identifying building blocks for a framework for the future a road map on how we can proceed with developing tools and techniques in conservation biology that have direct application from the genetics field.

True to form and my professors from the audience and my college students will recognize this I m not going to be reading the introductory in introducing the people that are going to speak this afternoon, I m not going to be reading from their abstracts or their descriptions in the programs. I figure you can read that yourself. So I m going to be coming up with a couple of things that the audience may not know about these folks. I m trying to be nice, so you guys don t run away from the room.

Our first speaker tonight today, this afternoon is Stephen Palumbi, who s a professor of Biology and Curator of Invertebrates at Harvard. And when I polled the room on some thoughts about Steve Palumbi, Rob DeSalle said: We fought like cats and dogs when were postdocs. But, through that process, we gained respect from each other. And that was one of the things he thought would be a useful thing for me to talk about.

The other thing I thought I d mention about Steve Palumbi was, most of us, when we visit other places and stay in a hotel room, we spend the day visiting sites walking through the markets, seeing what people are buying. We come back, and we turn on the TV, and we relax. Steve Palumbi takes a portable preliminary chain-reaction machine to other countries. Buys meat in the market, comes home and analyzes it. Somebody before mentioned about being a geek. (Laughter)

Hopefully, at some point, you ll learn why he does that. I don t think he s going to be talking about that today, but he s certainly published enough on it that you can find out. And Steve Palumbi, can you give us your thoughts for the future of conservation genetics?