PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD

Presented to Scott D. Sampson

Scott D. Sampson
Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Photo credit: Jedrzej Borowczyk

Citation by Matt Hudson

How many of us can trace our love for the earth sciences back to a specific person? For millions of children, that seed of scientific curiosity comes from Scott D. Sampson.

Scott is the host and science advisor for the television series *Dinosaur Train*, which is viewed by more than 9 million U.S. households per month, but his influence extends far beyond that. A Canadian-born paleontologist and evolutionary biologist, Scott has authored more than 142 science publications and, with his coauthors, named 18 species of dinosaurs. He has given hundreds of presentations in K–16 classrooms and devoted himself to public science outreach, specifically using earth sciences and dinosaurs as a vehicle for connecting kids with nature.

So many forces vie for children's attention today. Thanks to Dr. Scott, a generation is growing up with dinosaurs, geologic time, and the desire to get outside and discover science.

Response by Scott D. Sampson

First off, I would like to express warm thanks to the committee for selecting me as the recipient of the 2013 GSA Public Service Award. I am deeply honored. Like most of us, I was trained as an Earth scientist, so the vast bulk of my science communication skills have been acquired on the job.

I decided many years ago to devote much of my energies to public communication of science. I concluded that, at this critical juncture in history, one of the greatest challenges is broadening human understanding of earth and life systems, and how they interact. Like many others, my general audience presentations over the years have been sprinkled liberally with statistics on warming global temperatures, rates of species extinction, and precipitous loss of habitats. The unspoken message, shared with most environmentalists, has been one of doom and gloom.

The problem is, we've been operating under a false assumption. If only people understood the facts, we believed, they would alter their behavior. Yet, as any marketing executive will tell you, facts alone rarely shift behavior. It's emotions that count. Want to sell a new car? Forget about horsepower statistics and 0-60 acceleration times. Instead show beautiful people cruising through pristine landscapes.

The lesson for all of us is that if people are going to change their behaviors and act more sustainably, they must care first. And if they're going to care, they need to be inspired. Particularly when it comes to school-aged children, we are most effective as communicators when we open windows into wonder. Information is one powerful tool. It sparks the imagination to learn that we're made not only of star stuff, as Carl Sagan was fond of saying, but also of Earth stuff and the stuff of bacteria, fishes, and other mammals. Alongside information, however, equally important is direct, hands-on multisensory experience, particularly in natural settings.

Today more than ever before, we need earth scientists conveying their work to the general public. My plea tonight is that we balance the doom and gloom with inspiration, and that we seek out learning environments that foster profound experiences and enable imaginations to soar.

Once again, thank you very much.

Selected Bibliography of Scott D. Sampson

Scott Sampson has an extensive publications history, including books, peer-reviewed articles, and general audience articles. I have tried to capture a cross section of these sources in the below list.

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