

International

Monitoring the Earth's resources

The Earth lost more than 30 per cent of its natural wealth between 1970 and 1995, according to a report by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). There was a 50 per cent decline in freshwater resources, while marine systems deteriorated by 30 per cent and natural forest cover declined by 10 per cent. The report, *The Living Planet Index*, will be published annually by the WWF in association with the New Economics Foundation and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

Source: <http://www.panda.org>

Ramsar update

The most recent accessions to the Ramsar Convention are: Republic of Congo and Colombia (whose accessions came into force on 18 October 1998); Madagascar (in force 25 January 1999); and El Salvador (in force 22 May 1999). The total number of Parties to the Convention now stands at 114.

Source: <http://www.ramsar.org/about-cp-order.htm>

Reducing seabird kills

An international plan of action (IPOA) to reduce the number of seabirds killed each year on the baited hooks of longline fishing vessels was agreed in October 1998 by 81 member countries attending a meeting of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Rome. The measures, which include using streamers to scare the birds away, weighting lines so the baits sink faster and modifying fishing hooks, have potential to reduce seabird deaths by 80 per cent. The guidelines are voluntary but represent the first global plan of action specifically designed to reduce the bycatch of seabirds in commercial fishing gear. It is hoped that the IPOA will be adopted by the FAO conference in November 1999.

Sources: *Wildlife Conservation*, 102(2), 22; *World Birdwatch*, 21(1), 2.

New breeding technique to save endangered species

Ovarian tissue from three elephants in the Kruger National Park in South Africa was transplanted into mice with their ovaries removed to investigate a possible new technique to help breed endangered species. One of the mice developed a mature elephant's egg 2 months after transplantation. Eggs, even those of elephants, are microscopic, so size differences presented no problems and in theory the egg could have been removed, fertilized *in vitro* and transplanted into a female elephant. According to the scientific director of the Cryobiology Research Institute in Indianapolis, USA, storing ovarian tissue at low temperatures may be a simple way of preserving genetic material from female mammals, the advantage being that ovarian tissue can be easily frozen for preservation, whereas freezing entire eggs or embryos is difficult.

Source: *International Zoo News*, 46(1), 40.

North Atlantic right whale still in trouble

The North Atlantic right whale *Eubalaena glacialis* population has recovered only slowly since the cessation of commercial whaling and numbers c. 300 individuals. Research has shown that crude survival decreased from 0.99 per year in 1980 to 0.94 in 1994. Over the same period, population growth rate declined from 1.053 to 0.976. Under current conditions the population is doomed to extinction within 200 years. Reducing human-caused mortality—entanglement in fishing gear and collisions with ships—is essential for the viability of the population.

Source: Caswell, H. *et al.* (1999) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA*, 96, 3308–3313.

Europe

Grey wolf and domestic dogs seldom hybridize

It has been feared that interbreeding

between domestic dogs *Canis familiaris* and European populations of grey wolves *Canis lupus* threatened the genetic integrity of the latter species. However, a review of mitochondrial and biparentally inherited genetic markers in dogs and wild populations of wolf-like canids suggests that natural hybridization between grey wolves and domestic dogs is a much rarer event than is generally believed. This may be because dispersing female grey wolves attempt to form a new pack with a mate; male dogs do not assist in rearing offspring or form long-term bonds with females so offspring of wolf-dog matings may not survive in the wild. If they do survive, hybrids may not be well socialized and may have difficulty integrating into a wolf pack.

Source: Vilà, C. & Wayne, R.K. (1999) *Conservation Biology*, 13(1), 195–198.

Trawlers damaging cold-water reefs

Trawlers may be causing serious damage to the world's largest cold-water reef located off the Norwegian coast. Parts of the reef, on the Sula Ridge, have already been completely destroyed by trawling gear. According to Mark Tasker of the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the fishing industry poses a far greater threat to marine biodiversity than the oil industry.

Source: *British Wildlife*, 10(3), 216.

Lead shot ban throughout Sweden

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has extended the ban on the use of lead shot for wildfowl hunting from wetlands to the entire country because of the difficulty in delineating wetlands from surrounding areas.

Source: *Wetlands International*, No. 6, 12.

Call for protection of Wadden Sea

The World Wide Fund for Nature has called for the Wadden Sea, which is bounded by Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, to be designated a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. The call was triggered by an oil spill in October 1998 when the cargo vessel

Pallas was wrecked off the German island of Amrum. Twenty thousand seabirds and waders died as a result. Shipping accidents have been having serious impacts in the area in recent years.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 38(2), 67.

Belgian set-aside rich in beetle fauna

Set-aside fields of arable land in the Campine region of Flanders (Belgium), which were managed in various ways for nature conservation purposes, were found to contain 53 species of ground beetles including 11 Red Data Book species for Flanders. It appears that conversion of agricultural fields to set-aside fields has conservation potential for endangered carabid beetles.

Source: Desender, K. & Bosmans, R. (1998) *Biodiversity & Conservation*, 7, 1485–1493.

Brown bear in French Pyrénées

At the end of 1998, the population of the reintroduced brown bear *Ursus arctos* in the French central Pyrénées numbered six. Two females and one male from Slovenia were reintroduced in 1996 and 1997 (see *Oryx*, 32[1], 8–10). The two females gave birth to three and two cubs, respectively, in 1997 but one female was accidentally shot by a hunter in September 1997. It was first thought that her three cubs were too young to survive but two solitary cubs were observed in October 1998. The last population of the true Pyrenean brown bear is located in the western Pyrénées and numbers six individuals: a female with a cub born in 1997, a 3-year-old subadult male and three adult males. It was recently decided to reinforce the western population with two females from Croatia. This operation is scheduled for 1999 and 2000.

Source: *Nouvelles Ours*, No. 43, (sent by David.Brugiére@univ-rennes1.fr).

Grey wolves in the French Alps

There are now c. 30 grey wolves *Canis lupus* in the French Alps. Three or four packs are established within the Mercantour National Park, two wolves have been seen in the Queyras range in the High Alps and there have been reports of individuals in the Northern Alps. The wolves appear to be holding

their ground, although six to ten have been poached. A special committee with representatives from the Agriculture and Environment Ministries, scientists, hunters, farmers and NGOs has been formed to focus on wolf conservation and its attendant problems. The first wolves to reappear in France migrated from Italy in 1991–92, having been hunted out by 1940.

Source: F. Moutou, 27 January 1999.

Forest growth causing problems for the asp viper

The asp viper *Vipera aspis* was common in the northern Swiss Jura mountains until the 1940s, but during the past 50 years many local populations have disappeared and the species is threatened. Localities where the viper is still found are in areas with low tree density—at forest edges, in dry meadows and by roads—whereas areas from which the snake had disappeared have denser tree cover. This suggests that encroachment of bushes and trees in former habitats of *V. aspis* produced a colder, more humid microclimate, which was unfavourable to the viper. Logging may be required to maintain suitable habitat for this species.

Source: *Amphibia-Reptilia*, 20(1), 25–34.

Shortage of Spanish entomologists

The number of entomologists in Spain is insufficient to conduct the studies necessary to provide a basis for conserving the country's insect biodiversity. It is estimated that the entomological community should be increased by a factor of 1.67 to undertake the cataloguing and inventorying of the Spanish insect fauna within a reasonable period.

Source: Piera, F.M. (1999) *Quercus*, No. 156, 16–22.

North Eurasia

Fourth World Natural Heritage Site for Russia

Russia has gained its a fourth World Natural Heritage Site. The Altai Mountain Region was elected to the list of sites by the UNESCO Commission in Kyoto, Japan, in December 1998. The nominated area

includes Altai Zapovednik, Katunsky Zapovednik, Teleckoye Lake, Belukha Mountain and Ukok Highlands.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, No. 18, 43.

Zapovedniks in danger

The system of zapovedniks (state reserves) in Russia is in danger of collapse because of lack of financial and human resources. The 1999 federal budget passed by the Duma and the Council of the Federation has allocated 40 per cent less than the minimal amount required to support them. Funds for zapovedniks have been shrinking annually, with 1993 seeing only 2.1 per cent of the total federal budget allocated to funding for ecological programmes, including zapovedniks, but only 0.1 per cent has been allocated for 1999.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, No. 18, 3.

Help for rare raptors in Russia

A breeding centre for rare species of birds of prey at Galichya Gora Zapovednik (Lipetsk Oblast) has been working to revitalize local populations of these birds in the vicinity of the Middle Don River through the reintroduction of birds bred in captivity. The centre, which is funded mainly by Voronezh University and in part by the Lipetsk Regional Committee for Nature Protection, contains seven species including the saker falcon *Falco cherrug*. To date, 35 breeding adults have been raised, five pairs of which produced 38 chicks in 1998. A total of 47 birds have been reintroduced.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, No. 17, 14–16.

New protected area in Ukraine

Yavorovski National Park (7078.6 ha) has been established in Yavorovski District, Lvov Oblast, western Ukraine. It protects more than 1340 species of vascular plants, 27 of which are listed in the Ukrainian Red Data Book. The park also contains more than 250 bird species, 58 mammal species, 16 fish species, 12 species of amphibians and 8 reptile species. Its mosaic of soil types gives rise to 20 types of forest community.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, No. 17, 4.

Ukrainian zapovednik extended

The total area of the Black Sea Biosphere Zapovednik is to be enlarged by 13,461 ha, including 4700 ha of land in the Golopristsansky District, Khersonsky Oblast, and 8761 ha of sea, encompassing the Yaorlytsky Bay, thus protecting a typical maritime steppe habitat with more than 50 bird species.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, No. 18, 4.

Hydroelectric power station will affect nature park

The Ukrainian government has plans to build a Hydro Accumulation Power Station in the Southern Bug River, filling the Alexandrovsky Reservoir and decreasing the territory of the regional nature park Granite Steppe–Pobuzh'ye. The park is home to many endemic plant populations, which could suffer as a result. For the last decade Ukrainian residents have been protesting against these plans to the government.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, No. 18, 40.

Ukraine wetland's importance

A survey in 1998 revealed the importance to waterbirds of the Sivash wetland bordering the Azov Sea in southern Ukraine. A mid-August census found more than 1.4 million waterbirds, including 23,000 grebes, 30,000 cormorants, 208,000 swans, geese and ducks, 340,000 coot, 515,000 waders, 167,000 gulls and 96,000 terns. The survey confirmed that Sivash ranks alongside the Wadden Sea and Banc d'Arguin as one of the most important wetlands for birds in the Western Palearctic flyway.

Source: *Wetlands International*, No. 6, 12.

New national park proposed for Kazakhstan

A proposal is being put forward to create Katon–Karagaisky National Park in the southern Altai Mountains in eastern Kazakhstan. The Altai extends from Russia into China and Mongolia, encompassing part of eastern Kazakhstan, and contains a full spectrum of landscape and climatic zones, biodiversity and natural resources. The park would be bounded on the north and east by the Russian–Chinese border, to the west

by the upper reaches of the Buchtarma River and to the south by Lake Markakol, a proposed territory of 13,000 sq km. It would border Katunsky Zapovednik in Russia and Belukha National Park on the border of Russia and Kazakhstan, creating a total of 14,500 sq km of protected areas. It is hoped that the park may be created by 2001.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, No. 18, 11–13.

White-headed duck in danger

A 3-month survey of white-headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, in what was believed to be its principal breeding ground in Kazakhstan, found just 12 birds.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 3.

North Africa and Middle East

Arabian oryx reintroductions update

In 1998, for the fourth consecutive year, Arabian oryx *Oryx leucoryx* were translocated from the National Wildlife Research Centre, Taif, to the Uruq Bani Ma'arid protected area in Saudi Arabia. By March 1997 the reserve had an estimated 110 Arabian oryx, a further 17 had been added by March 1998 and by the end of April 1998 there were estimated to be 155 wild ranging oryx in the reserve.

Source: *International Zoo News*, 46(1), 35–36.

Successful conclusion to Abu Dhabi Oryx conference

The 1st Abu Dhabi International Arabian Oryx Conference, which convened in the capital of the United Arab Emirates in February 1999, concluded successfully with the drafting of a memorandum of understanding, the 'Abu Dhabi Declaration'. This is an agreement between interested parties to foster increased international collaboration between breeding establishments and research institutes world-wide, and between environmental authorities throughout the range states. Breeding loans and exchanges are part of the agreement and started immediately, with the despatch in March of two mature animals to

Zurich Zoo, Switzerland. The facilitation of successful reintroductions to the wild was an agreed major goal of attending parties. A regional advisory group is to be set up, and the Sultanate of Oman has offered to host its first meeting. Conference proceedings will be published later in 1999. Contact: The Director, EWM, PO Box 77, Abu Dhabi, UAE; Fax: +971 2 663033; E-mail: wildlife@dpanet.org.ae
Source: Environment & Wildlife Management Office of the Private Department of His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan al Nahyan.

A new subspecies of lizard from Eastern Iran

A new lizard *Phrynocephalus ornatus vindumi* has been described from Iran. It can be distinguished from other subspecies by having a rose-coloured spot with blue edges on the neck. It has been recorded from eastern Iran, being found from the Kavir-i-Namak Desert east to the Iranian–Afghanistan border, (it may also occur in adjoining areas of the latter country), and south-east to the Sistan Basin and Farah-Rud River.

Source: *Hamadryad*, 23(2), 162–168.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Senegal tortoise reserve

The President of Senegal has created a Special Fauna Reserve to protect the Vulnerable African spurred tortoise *Geochelone sulcata*. Located near Ranérou in North-Ferlo, this 2600-ha reserve forms the central hub of a Sahelian zone suitable for tortoise survival.

Source: *La Tortue*, No. 45, 15.

Shoebill storks need help

Geneviève Renson photographed and recorded the breeding behaviour of the poorly known shoebill, or whale-headed, stork *Balaeniceps rex* in the Bangweulu swamp, Northern Province, Zambia, between 1992 and 1997. The survey covered 28 months in total and recorded behaviour not previously described. The birds are threatened by various factors but particularly by local people who destroy the nests. The species is

restricted to a narrow range of central and southern Africa with its main breeding area in the swamps of southern Sudan and Zambia, and is listed as Near Threatened by IUCN. The last census of the Bangweulu swamp, by the Zambian Ornithological Society in 1995, found only 44 shoebills, and Renson makes a plea for protection of the birds and the swamp to prevent further declines.
 Source: Renson, G. (1998) *Alauda*, 66(2), 81–96.

New South African protea

A new spiderhead protea *Serruria nova* has been discovered on a farm in the Bredasdorp Mountains in South Africa by members of the Protea Atlas Project. This is the sixth new protea species discovered by the project in 7 years. The new species has been nicknamed the clandestine spiderhead because it eluded detection for many years in a botanically well-explored area.
 Source: Veld & Flora, 85(1), 11.

A magical medicinal tree in decline

Numbers of mutavhatsindi trees *Brackenridgea zanguebarica* are declining in their only known site in the eastern Soutpansberg Mountains, Northern Transvaal, South Africa. In 1992, 200 ha of land was proclaimed as the Mutavhatsindi Nature Reserve after many of the trees in the area were damaged or destroyed by road building. The tree's roots and bark are used for treating ailments locally and for magical purposes—they sell at high prices now because of their scarcity—and outside the reserve many trees have been killed. Inside the reserve the trees are also declining because goats and cattle have been excluded, which has allowed other species to compete with the mutavhatsindi trees, which require open areas with sparse grass cover.
 Source: Veld & Flora, 85(1), 17.

South Africa's first Man and the Biosphere Reserve

The Kogelberg area in the Western Cape, South Africa, has been recognized as a Biosphere Reserve under the United Nations' Man and the Biosphere programme. The core area of the reserve is an extremely important site for the protection of

biodiversity of the Cape Floral Kingdom.
 Source: Veld & Flora, 85(1), 2–3.

Two *Erica* rediscoveries

Erica ixanthera, last seen in 1909 has been rediscovered in the Langeberg of South Africa, as well as *Erica tenuicaulis*, last seen in 1912.
 Source: Veld & Flora, 85(1), 27–29.

Recognition for Meller's duck

Meller's duck *Anas melleri*, which is restricted to threatened wetlands on the eastern slope of the central highlands of Madagascar, was considered to be a recent isolate of the widespread common mallard *A. platyrhynchos* and therefore not worthy of protection. However, genetic analysis indicates that the duck is distinct from the mallard and from its nearest geographical congener, the yellow-billed duck *A. undulata*, and may have evolved from a non-dimorphic ancestor, the African black duck *A. sparsa*. The declining numbers of the Near-Threatened Meller's duck highlight the need for adequate protection of its wetland habitat.
 Source: Young, H.G. & Rhymer, J.M. (1998) *Biodiversity and Conservation*, 7, 1313–1328.

New scops owl

A new species of owl, the Moheli scops owl, *Otus moheliensis*, has been described from the island of Moheli in the Comoros. It is restricted to forest habitats, which now cover just 5 per cent of the island, and the current estimates put the total population at c. 400 individuals.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 7.

South and South East Asia

Long distance seed dispersal by Old World fruit bats

Old World fruit bats may have the potential to disperse small seeds hundreds of kilometres, according to a study that found that the fruit bat *Cynopterus sphinx* retains food and viable fig seeds in its gut for more than 12 h in daytime. Previously it was believed that rapid food transit times (generally less than 30 min) limited their ability to disperse seeds

to just a few tens of kilometres. Field observations indicate that this behaviour also occurs in other genera of Old World fruit bats, which are highly mobile, with many species undertaking considerable foraging and migration flights.
 Source: Shilton, L.A. et al. (1999) *Proceedings of the Royal Society London B*, 266, 219–223.

Vultures declining rapidly in India

The Eurasian griffon *Gyps fulvus*, white-rumped vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, Egyptian vulture *Neophron percnopterus* and long-billed vulture *Gyps indicus* are declining rapidly throughout their range in northern India. The extent of the declines is unknown because of the paucity of baseline data, but in Koeladeo National Park, Bharatpur, there were around 350 nests of white-rumped vultures in the mid-1980s compared with 25 in 1998. Local newspapers frequently report that carcasses are being left uneaten because of the scarcity of these scavenging birds. It is thought that pesticides are responsible for the declines.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 6.

Decline in ungulates linked to tiger decline in southern India

Analysis of the scats of leopards in two protected areas in southern India—Kalakad–Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve and Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary—found that the species consumed were similar but that mean prey weight and proportion of large ungulates were markedly lower in Kalakad–Mundanthurai, where leopard density is approximately half that in Mudumalai. No evidence of tigers was found in Kalakad–Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve and the relatively low density of large ungulates there may explain this. If a tiger population still survives there it could be enhanced by managing the habitat for large ungulates—large areas of grazing land in the reserve have changed to thicket, reducing the available forage for large ungulates.
 Source: Ramakrishnan, U. et al. (1999) *Biological Conservation*, 89(2), 113–120.

Indus gharials under threat from drainage scheme

The Indus gharial *Gavialis gangeticus* and other wildlife in the lower Indus River are under threat from the Pakistan National Drainage Programme (NDP), which plans to funnel agricultural runoff into the river from almost 405,000 ha acres of farmland. Two inland lakes have already been destroyed by effluent being dumped into the river and an Environmental Impact Assessment has predicted that water will become undrinkable in many areas of the river. In addition, the mouth of the river, including the world's sixth largest mangrove forest, will also suffer severe damage and the entire lower Indus will be degraded as gharial habitat within a few years. The Tropical Conservation Fund is trying to get the World Bank to re-evaluate its funding of the project until a proper investigation has been completed.

Source: IUCN/SSC Crocodile Specialist Group Newsletter, 17(4), 5–6.

A new gecko for Pakistan

A new species of gecko lizard *Tenuidactylus rhodocaudus* has been described from the Tobar Kakar Range of north-eastern Balochistan, Pakistan. The species has a montane distribution, being found 1800–2000 m above sea level, and inhabits crevices and the undersurfaces of sandstone slabs. It is distinguished from other similar species by its black-and-pink banded tail with two rows of spinose tubercles.

Source: *Hamadryad*, 23(2), 127–132.

New park in Myanmar

On 10 October 1998 Myanmar gazetted Mount Hkakaborazi National Park on the border with Tibet. It covers 3812 sq km of snow-capped Himalayan peaks, sub-alpine habitats and tropical evergreen rain forests, and shelters mammals such as takin, red panda, goral, musk deer and black barking deer. Unfortunately, it does not cover the range of the recently discovered leaf deer—a species of muntjac (see *Oryx*, 32[3], 201–208).

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, 102(1), 17.

Hollywood destroying Thai national park

20th Century Fox's film, *The Beach*, is

being shot on Phi Phi Leh Island, a national park, in Thailand. Parts of the film will be shot on Maya Beach and the film company has already bulldozed large portions of the beach and removed much of the natural vegetation in order to widen the beach to accommodate a football scene. Fox plans to replace the native vegetation with 100 non-native coconut palms. The beach has already been eroded and local people are worried about how much of the beach and bay will remain after the monsoons. Phi Phi Leh Island is supposedly protected as a national park and is key to the local tourist economy. Thai environmentalists report that the Royal Forestry Department violated its own regulations and was bought off by 20th Century Fox, who paid the government Bhat 4 million. A lawsuit has been filed, but an injunction to stop further destruction of the island was denied.

Source: <http://www.wildrockies.org/wve/beach.htm>

New civet record in Vietnam

A recently discovered species of civet *Viverra tainguensis* has been captured on film using photo-trapping equipment during a Fauna & Flora International project in Na Hang Nature Reserve, Tuyen Quang Province, northern Vietnam. It is a new record for the reserve, which is the only known site for the Critically Endangered Tonkin snub-nosed money *Rhinopithecus avunculus*, and for the distribution of the species. The species was described in 1996 from the Tay Nguyen Highlands in Vietnam's Gia Lai Province.

Source: Fauna & Flora International.

New Vietnamese bird

A new species of barwing *Actinodura sodangorum*—the black-crowned barwing—has been described from the proposed Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve in the Western Highlands of Vietnam. The bird has a distinctive black crown—a feature otherwise unknown in the genus, of which it is the southernmost known representative. It occurs in montane evergreen forest at 1100–2400 m and is likely to occur also in adjacent Laos.

Source: Eames, J.C. et al. (1999) *Ibis*, 141, 1–10.

Blast fishing continues to destroy reefs

Blast fishing, in which once dynamite and now bombs made of agricultural fertilizers and kerosene, are used to kill fish at coral reefs, has been used in Indonesia for 50 years and continues, despite its illegality. In the Spermonde archipelago in south-west Sulawesi, c. 10–40 per cent of fish sold in the market in the city of Ujung Pandang are caught by blast fishing. In addition to destroying the reef, the fishing results in extensive kills of non-target and juvenile fish and invertebrates. Most of the blast fishers themselves appear to be oblivious of the detrimental effects of the fishery on future fish stocks, despite educational efforts by the local university and NGOs. Increasing the intensity of patrols and fines would require enormous resources. A more effective option would be to create a national marine reserve in the archipelago to serve as a sanctuary for remaining fish stocks. The South Sulawesi Department of Planning is working to create a 100-ha reserve on the north-western edge of the coastal shelf, centred on the island of Kapoposang where the people do not use blast fishing and where the relatively unspoiled reefs attract substantial dive tourism. However, 100 ha in the 240,000 ha Spermonde will not be enough to generate alternative incomes for the entire population of fishers in the area. Source: Pet-Soede, L. & Erdmann, M.V. (1998) *Naga, The ICLARM Quarterly*, 21(2), 4–9.

Mangrove rehabilitation in West Java

A pilot project, linking community and environment, initiated by Wetlands International in Indramayu District, West Java, Indonesia, involved 150 local people in planting 5000 mangrove seedlings in September 1998. The project was set up to address the problems of failing local fishpond practices and diminishing coastal economic resources, and has two goals: to restore local fishpond activities by introducing an environmentally sound system; and to find methods that encourage community participation in the maintenance of mangrove systems.

Source: *Wetlands International*, No. 6, 16.

New parks for Indonesia

Indonesia has declared two national parks on the island of Sumba, part of Nusa Tenggara Province. The Manupeu-Langgaliru National Park (880 sq km) in west Sumba will protect the island's largest remaining tract of lowland semi-deciduous monsoon forest. The Laiwangi-Wanggameti National Park (470 sq km) in east Sumba includes the largest tract of closed canopy forest on the island, extending from sea-level to Sumba's highest peak, Gunung Wanggameti (1225 m). The forests are home to 12 rare bird species, seven of which are endemic to Sumba and four of which are threatened with extinction: Sumba hornbill *Aceros everetti*, Sumba boobook *Ninox rudolphi*, Sumba green pigeon *Treeron teysmanii* and red-naped fruit dove *Ptilinopus dohertyi*.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 2.

New scops owl

A new species of scops owl, *Otus collari*, from Sangihe in Indonesia has been named in honour of Nigel Collar of BirdLife International.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, 21(1), 3.

Recovery plan for Philippine crocodile

A plan for the recovery of the Philippine crocodile *Crocodylus mindorensis* has been developed by the country's Crocodile Farming Institute and the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources, together with Melbourne Zoo, Australia. The species is thought to be restricted to Naujan Lake on Mindoro, Aguasan Marsh and Linguasan Marsh on Mindanao, the Dipuyai and Busuanga Rivers on Busuanga and possibly Tuguegarao in northern Luzon. The primary goal of the plan is to re-establish the species in the wild and ensure its long-term survival throughout its historic range. The 5-year plan links the conservation of crocodiles with wetland conservation in the Philippines.
 Source: *IUCN/SSC Crocodile Specialist Group Newsletter*, 17(4), 10–11.

New crab from the Philippines

A new genus and species of terrestrial potamid crab *Carpomon pomulum* (*pomulum* is Latin for little apple) has been described from the island of

Palawan in the Philippines. The holotype measures 31 × 25.7 mm and the new genus is distinguishable from all other Philippine potamids in its smooth, inflated carapace and other physical characteristics.
 Source: Tan, S.H. & Ng, P.K.L. (1998) *Hydrobiologia*, 379, 93–96.

Good news from Cebu

Several patches of surviving forest have been identified on the Philippine island of Cebu (see Collar, N.J. [1998] *Oryx*, 32[4], 239–243), including one of at least 700 ha, almost certainly the largest surviving tract on the island and much larger than the c. 180-ha Tabunan, which was believed to be the last remaining patch of native forest. Along with these findings were the rediscovery/confirmation of four more (hitherto believed extinct) Cebu endemic birds, bringing the total number of known surviving endemic bird to 12 of the 14 forms described.
 Source: William Oliver, Fauna & Flora International.

East Asia

Disposable chopsticks must go

Every year China fells 25 million trees to make 45 billion pairs of disposable chopsticks, which are widely used in restaurants and other public eating places. Chinese environmentalists are campaigning for a ban on these because of the country's severe shortage of trees. The campaign is taking off: disposable chopsticks have been banned at Beijing Forestry University; workers at the National Environmental Protection Agency now use their own; and some well-known restaurants have stopped using disposable chopsticks. Rigorous controls are needed over the felling of trees for disposable chopsticks according to Liu Yun, director of the China Chopsticks Museum.
 Source: *New Internationalist*, April 1999, 4.

Migrating birds hunted in China

For over 10 years, 10 coastal villages in the vicinity of Jijia Town, Leizhou Municipality, Guangdong Province, China, have been hunting migrating birds between September and

November for the food market. Over 100,000 birds are killed every year and the hunting pressure has been increasing. The Town Government is managing the hunting activities and the market for the birds, thus breaking various wildlife laws.
 Source: *Porcupine*, No. 18, 28.

Kingfisher at risk from hydroelectric scheme

Che Ba Ling National Nature Reserve in northern Guangdong Province, China, is under threat from ecotourism and a hydroelectric scheme. Parts of the reserve have been cleared to provide tourist amenities but more damaging is the construction of a hydroelectric scheme in the heart of the reserve, which has led to the permanent diversion of c. 3 km of river, the construction of a new access road and the destruction of forest along one side of the river. The diversion of the river will result in the permanent loss of one or two vulnerable Blyth's kingfisher *Alcedo hercules* territories and, together with the likely loss of further land around the headquarters, about 25–40 per cent of the river formerly used by the species will be unsuitable. In addition, human pressure has increased considerably with much collecting of forest products, even in the restricted-access core area.
 Source: *Porcupine*, No. 18, 4.

Blast fishing in Hong Kong

Explosives have been used for fishing in Hong Kong waters for at least 100 years. Legislation against blast fishing was introduced in 1903 but the practice continues despite increasing penalties and educational campaigns. The main problem is lack of enforcement of the laws because the Marine Police have limited resources. Only a few fishing communities are responsible for the majority of explosive use, and increased vigilance and education efforts directed towards these communities may be effective where legislation has failed.
 Source: Cornish, A.S. & McKellar, D. (1998) *Naga, The ICLARM Quarterly*, 21(3), 4–9.

Reintroducing fireflies in Taiwan

In 1996 Taiwan's Construction and Planning Administration of the

Ministry of the Interior started a project led by Professor Yang Ping-shih of Taiwan University to reintroduce fireflies into Taiwan's national parks because urbanization was destroying their habitats. Surveys since the start of the project have revealed the presence 45 species of fireflies in the parks. Professor Yang said that the project had had a positive effect on the promotion of research into fireflies, which require a pollution-free environment and low levels of light to survive. It was thus essential the firefly populations were now monitored to prevent further destruction of their environment. *Source: International Conservation Newsletter*, 6(4), 6.

Hybridization threatens endemic bulbul

Styan's bulbul *Pycnonotes taiwanus*, a bird that is endemic to the lowlands of southern Taiwan, faces extinction by hybridization with light-vented bulbuls *P. sinensis*. Both species are native to the island but hybridization is becoming more common as a result of religious bird releases (the public buy captured birds and release them to commemorate special days). Light-vented bulbuls, which have a wide distribution in China, Vietnam and Taiwan, are commonly released on these occasions into parts of Taiwan where they do not occur naturally. *Source: World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 5.

North America

Canadians protest over threatened species bill

More than 600 Canadian scientists have written to the prime minister demanding that planned legislation to protect endangered species is based on scientific criteria. The letter complains that the government has omitted two vital factors from the proposed new legislation: habitat protection and the exclusive input of scientists to identify and list species at risk. The scientists' concern was heightened by the government's removal of the voting rights of most of the non-governmental scientists on the supposedly independent Committee on

the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, which is charged with identifying and listing such species. The letter has been posted on the website of the University of British Columbia's Centre for Biodiversity Research: <http://www.zoology.ubc.ca/biodiversity>. *Source: Nature*, 398, 4.

Seal hunt in Canada

The 1999 allowable catch of harp seals *Phoca groenlandica* in Canada has been held at the 1998 level of 275,000. The most recent population survey, in 1994, estimated that there were 4.8 million harp seals in Canada, more than twice the number in the early 1970s. The hooded seal *Cystophora cristata* quota for 1999 is 10,000 animals and a few hundred grey seals *Halichoerus grypus* will be killed in areas other than Sable Island, Nova Scotia. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans will undertake a harp seal population survey in 1999 and a hooded seal survey in 2000. *Source: TRAFFIC North America*, 2(1), 7.

The fate of trawl web

Among other fishing gear abandoned in the ocean, discarded trawl web can kill marine mammals, seabirds, marine turtles and fish. In Alaska, discarded trawl web is common on beaches and an entanglement hazard, especially to northern fur seals *Callorhinus ursinus*. To discover the fate of stranded trawl web, 35 fragments were radio-tagged on Kayak Island, Alaska, and monitored for 10 months by a remote tracking station. After this time, 18 fragments were still on the island but had moved an average of 2.0 km from their original locations. The fate of the other 17 fragments was not determined but they were probably washed back into the sea by severe storms where they would pose further threat to wildlife. Beach clean-up programmes already exist in many places but need to be established in remote areas, such as Alaska, to reduce threats to marine life. *Source: Johnson, S.W. & Eiler, J.H. (1999) Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 38(2), 136–141.

Pressure to resume a whale hunt

The Makah tribe of Washington, USA, have been preparing to hunt whales since 1995 when the Clinton

Administration granted them permission to kill four or five grey whales *Eschrichtius robustus* annually over a 5-year period, even though the International Whaling Commission (IWC) does not recognize the tribe's claims for cultural whaling. The Makah stopped whaling in 1926 because of the scarcity of whales but when the species was removed from the US Endangered Species List in 1996 many in the tribe wanted to renew the hunt. Some people in the tribe as well as conservationists from outside are trying actively to stop the hunt by driving the whales away from the area and no whales have been killed yet. *Source: Audubon*, 101(1), 18.

Caviar seized

A shipment of caviar with a retail market value of \$US700,000–1,000,000 was seized in October 1998 by authorities at New York's international airport. The caviar was smuggled in on a Finnair flight from Poland and is believed to have originated in the Caspian Sea, where overfishing to supply the caviar trade is the most important cause of decline in sturgeon stocks. Two US residents and a Polish national were charged with violating international laws protecting Caspian Sea sturgeon *Acipenser* spp. *Source: TRAFFIC North America*, 2(1), 12.

Return of the sculpin

A deepwater sculpin *Myoxocephalus thompsoni* was found at a depth of 145 m during a research survey in 1998—the species had not been seen in the US waters of Lake Ontario for more than 50 years. It was suspected that the reason for the disappearance was an introduced fish, the alewife *Alosa pseudoharengus*, which feeds on other fish larvae. Now large populations of restocked trout appear to be keeping the alewife population in check. Several other native species are also increasing and the waters are becoming cleaner. *Source: Wildlife Conservation*, 102(1), 18.

Swordfish ban

Towards the end of 1998, the US National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) closed the year's driftnet fishing for Atlantic swordfish

Xiphias gladius off the eastern coast of the USA. The closure became necessary when 10 vessels from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Florida, caught 10 tonnes of swordfish near George's Bank but also killed 35 marine turtles and 293 whales, dolphins and other marine mammals in 109 monitored net hauls. The NMFS also proposed new rules governing the use of anchored gillnets in the Gulf of Maine and mid-Atlantic waters, which require expanded use of sonic 'pingers' on the nearly invisible gillnets to protect harbour porpoises. According to the NMFS, gillnets in the Gulf of Maine and the mid-Atlantic kill 2000 harbour porpoises *Phocoena phocoena* a year—the population can withstand only 483 annual deaths to commercial fishing. The fishing could be opened again this year despite the fact that the swordfish are themselves imperilled.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, 102(1), 10.

Supporting lynx introduction in Colorado?

On 19 October 1998, members of the Earth Liberation Front allegedly set fires on two ridges at Vail, Colorado, USA, causing an estimated \$US12 million in damages to two restaurants and four ski lifts. The fires were set just 2 days after Vail Associates, owners of the ski resort, started clearing trees for an expansion scheme in an area where lynx *Lynx canadensis* were last seen in the state, in 1974. Conservationists are opposed to the expansion because it will destroy potential lynx habitat but Vail Associates say that the expansion has been designed as if the lynx were already listed as an endangered species. The company has provided \$US200,000 towards the Colorado Division of Wildlife's effort to reintroduce 40 lynx from Canada into a 6000-sq-mile area 200 miles south of Vail.

Source: *Audubon*, 101(1), 14.

Sardines recover

The US Department of Fish and Game announced in January that the sardine resource off California is now considered fully recovered following its decline between the 1940s and the 1960s, caused by unfavourable ocean climate conditions and overfishing. A

moratorium on the fishery was introduced in 1967 and by the 1980s sardines were showing signs of recovery, appearing as bycatch in anchovy and mackerel fisheries. The moratorium was lifted in 1986 and since then the sardine population is estimated to have increased by 20–30 per cent per year. All the criteria for considering the sardine population fully recovered, including the population biomass reaching a million tons, occupation of its historic range (Mexico to Canada) and all historic age classes being represented, have now been met.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 38(3), 159.

Protection for Californian plants

Sixteen Californian plants have been given ESA (Endangered Species Act) protection because of various threats to their habitats including mining, urbanization, off-road vehicle use, pipeline construction and maintenance, grazing, and trampling by hikers. Three desert species, (Lane Mountain milk-vetch *Astragalus jaegerianus*, Coachella Valley milk-vetch *Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *coachellae* and triple-ridged milk-vetch *Astragalus tricarinatus*), two wetland species (Munz's onion *Allium munzii* and San Jacinto Valley crownscale *Atriplex coronata* var. *notator*), two chaparral/scrub species (Nevin's barberry *Berberis nevinii* and Mexican flannelbush *Fremonotodendron mexicanum*) and the willow monardella *Monardella linoidea* spp. *viminea* were listed as endangered. The other species were listed as threatened.

Source: *Endangered Species Bulletin*, 24(1), 26–27.

Arkansas River shiner protected

The Arkansas River shiner *Notropis girardi*, a small fish found in the Canadian River in New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, and the Cimarron River in Kansas and Oklahoma has been listed as threatened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Threats to the habitat of the species include water diversions, ground water pumping, water pollution and competition from non-native fish.

Source: *Endangered Species Bulletin*, 24(1), 27.

Shiner surprise

The Cahabar shiner *Notropis cahabae*, once believed to occur in only a few kilometres of the Cahaba River in central Alabama, USA, has been found at several sites in an unconnected river in the state—Locust Fork of the Black Warrior River, where it appears to be more abundant and more widely distributed than in the Cahaba. This fish was discovered in 1969 and listed as Endangered in 1990.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, 102(1), 13.

Alabama aquatic snails protected

Six species of aquatic snails found only in the Black Warrior, Cahaba, Alabama and Coosa Rivers in central Alabama were given US Endangered Species Act protection in 1998. Three of the species, cylindrical lioplax *Lioplax cyclostomaformis*, flat pebblesnail *Lepyrium showalteri* and plicate rocksnail *Leptoxis plicata* were listed as Endangered. The other three species were listed as Threatened.

Source: *Endangered Species Bulletin*, 24(1), 27.

Virginia sneezeweed protected

The Virginia sneezeweed *Helenium virginicum*, restricted to ponds and meadows in the USA state of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, has been listed as Threatened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Threats include residential development, incompatible agricultural practices, and filling and draining wetlands.

Source: *Endangered Species Bulletin*, 24(1), 27.

Disease in Florida Key corals

One-hundred-year-old corals growing on the Florida Keys are succumbing to diseases that they were previously able to resist. Up to 40 per cent of sea fan corals are infected by fungal disease caused by a common soil-dwelling fungus *Aspergillus*, which is washed out to sea by land erosion and causes the infection that discolours and then causes lesions and tumour as it destroys the coral. The Florida Keys reef ecosystems are close to substantial freshwater runoff and subject to fluctuating water temperatures, which may make them particularly vulnerable to disease, but the situation may have worsened in recent years because of eutrophication

and siltation caused by intensive use of land and offshore waters.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 38(3), 159.

Coral smugglers arrested

On 12 November 1998, a Florida importer and a Philippines exporter were charged with conspiring to smuggle protected corals and seashells into the USA—the first US federal criminal felony case brought against alleged smugglers of internationally regulated corals and seashells.

Source: *TRAFFIC North America*, 2(1), 11–12.

Reptile smugglers charged

Two employees of a cruise ship line that tours the Caribbean and Bahamas, and another person were accused on 30 October 1998 of smuggling protected reptiles into the USA.

Between 1992 and 1997 the defendants are said to have smuggled CITES-listed reptiles from various West Indies islands to the USA for commercial gain. The species include Appendix I Exuma Island rock iguana and Virgin Island rock iguana (*Cyclura* spp.) and Appendix II red-footed tortoise *Geochelone carbonaria*.

Source: *TRAFFIC North America*, 20(1), 9–10.

Florida toughens conservation laws

Last November voters in Florida, USA, passed by a 72 per cent margin, Conservation Amendment 5 to the state constitution, which requires tougher laws to protect natural resources and establishes an autonomous agency to manage them. The amendment also extends indefinitely Preservation 200, the 10-year \$US3-billion land-acquisition programme that started in 1990, and strengthens protection for land incorporated into the programme.

Source: *Audubon*, 101(2), 101.

Manatee sanctuary

A new sanctuary for manatees *Trichechus manatus* has been created by the US Fish and Wildlife Service at Three Sisters Springs in Crystal River, Florida. More than 250 manatees winter in the area because of its warmth but disturbance by tourists and others had been driving the animals out to colder waters. The area

is now off-limits to people between 15 November and 31 March each year.

Source: *Audubon*, 101(2), 18.

Eel invasion

Asian swamp, or rice, eels have established in the wild in Florida and Georgia, USA, raising concern that they will compete with or prey on native aquatic species. These nocturnal predators, which grow up to 1 m long, feed on fish, worms, crustaceans and amphibians. Since 1997 they have been found in several scattered sites in the two states and it is speculated that the first invaders may have been released by aquarium owners or pet breeders.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, 102(2), 18.

Silversword success

Restoration efforts for the Mauna Kea silversword *Argyroxiphium sandwicense*, an endangered plant endemic to the high-altitude cinder deserts of Mauna Kea on Hawaii, have increased the natural population of c. 50 adult plants by c. 500 individuals, primarily by planting silverswords initially grown under controlled conditions. The plant, a giant rosette with one or more showy flower stalks, is of interest to conservation biologists because it is rare, monocarpic and primarily self-incompatible. By 1892 it was nearly extinct as a result of browsing damage by introduced sheep and goats.

Source: Walker, L.R. & Powell, E.A. (1999) *Biological Conservation*, 89(1), 61–70.

Wise use of wetlands in Mexico

The first state programme in Mexico to focus on the wise use of wetlands has been set up in Tabasco, the state with the greatest wealth of wetlands. The eastern region holds a remarkable complex of lagoons, swamps and large flooded areas, the Centla Swamps—a refuge for numerous endangered plants and animals, including manatee *Trichechus manatus*. The programme is run under a co-operative agreement between Tabasco's State Secretariat of Development and Environmental Protection, and Wetlands International.

Source: *Wetlands International*, No. 6, 14.

Cowbird threatens Mexican endemics

The shiny cowbird *Molothrus bonariensis*, a South American brood

parasitic species that has spread through the West Indies and has had a detrimental effect on several bird species, particularly island endemics, has reached the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. This may pose a problem for the conservation of Yucatan endemic bird species.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 3.

Mexico lists mahogany

Mexico has included its population of big-leaf mahogany *Swietenia macrophylla* in CITES Appendix III. Costa Rica, Bolivia and Brazil have already included their populations of this species on Appendix III after the Ninth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES failed to list it on Appendix I in 1994. The timber is highly valued by furniture manufacturers, and conservationists are becoming increasingly concerned about illegal logging, management practices and long-term timber supplies.

Source: *TRAFFIC North America*, 2(1), 8.

Kingpin reptile dealer arrested

A US Fish and Wildlife Service investigation has resulted in the arrest by Mexican officials of international wildlife dealer Ken Liang Wong. Wong, who runs Sungai Rusa Wildlife in Penang, Malaysia, is believed to be the kingpin of an international operation that smuggled more than \$US0.5 million dollars worth of reptiles from south-east and central Asia, New Zealand and Madagascar to the USA from January 1996 to August 1998. The species included ploughshare tortoise *Geochelone yniphora*, Komodo dragons *Varanus komodensis* and Chinese alligators *Alligator sinensis*, which are prohibited in commercial international trade under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Source: *TRAFFIC North America*, 2(1), 8–9.

Central America and the Caribbean

Management for crocodiles

The population of *Crocodylus moreletii*

in the Peten of Guatemala, an area of the Laguna del Tigre National Park, is in danger of extinction and urgently requires a management plan. In 1998 an investigation found that population densities were relatively low compared with other studies, with estimates between 2.1 and 4.35 individuals/km and that the main threats were hunting, habitat loss and the use of fishing nets.

Source: IUCN/SSC Crocodile Specialist Group Newsletter, 17(4), 13.

Green turtles monitored for 25 years

The green turtle *Chelonia mydas* population that nests at Tortuguero, Costa Rica, is the largest in the Atlantic. Surveys to monitor nesting activity on the northern 18 km of the 36-km beach started in 1971. Survey data show a relatively consistent increase from 1971 to the mid-1980s, constant or perhaps decreasing nesting during the late 1980s, and an upward trend in the 1990s. The limitations of the survey methods mean that the trends must be viewed with caution and the upward trend must be assessed from the perspective of the catastrophic decline in the Caribbean green turtle populations since the arrival of Europeans. However, if careful management continues in Costa Rica and is adopted throughout the region, the collapse of the Caribbean green turtle populations, which seemed imminent in the 1950s, can be avoided.

Source: Bjorndal, K.A. *et al.* (1999) *Conservation Biology*, 13(1), 126–134.

Amphibian crashes linked to warming

Research has linked the 1987 synchronous population crashes in 20 of 50 species of amphibians, including the locally endemic golden toad *Bufo periglenes*, in a 30-sq-km area of highland forest at Monteverde, Costa Rica, to the warming of tropical oceans that started in 1976. The crashes probably belong to a constellation of demographic changes that have altered communities of birds, reptiles and amphibians in the area, and are linked to recent warming. The changes are all associated with patterns of dry-season mist frequency, which is negatively correlated with sea-surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific

and which has declined dramatically since the mid-1970s.

Source: Pounds, J.A. *et al.* (1999) *Nature*, 398, 611.

Disease and amphibian declines

Declines in amphibian populations in the Reserva Forestal Fortuna, Chiriquí, Panama, have been attributed to a fungal infection of the skin. Symptoms of the decline included population reductions, the presence of dead or dying adults, and tadpole abnormalities. Streamside frogs were abundant and diverse in 1993–95, were restricted to a few streams in December 1996–January 1997 and became rare throughout the reserve in July–August 1997. Clinical signs of the decline were similar to those found in the frogs of Monteverde and Las Tablas, Costa Rica (see *Oryx*, 32[4], 238–239).

Source: Lips, K.R. (1999) *Conservation Biology*, 13(1), 117–125.

Oriole rescue on hold

The endemic Montserrat oriole *Icterus oberi* population has declined from c. 1000 to 200 individuals as a result of the activity of the Soufriere Volcano on the island of Montserrat in the Caribbean. Most of the habitat has been destroyed and the remaining birds are confined to the northern tip of the island. In early 1998, the Sustainable Ecosystems Institute in Portland, Oregon, USA, asked the government of Montserrat for permission to capture up to 20 pairs of orioles to save them from the volcano and transfer them to Costa Rica's Institute for the Study and Preservation of Tropical Birds for captive breeding on the understanding that the birds would be returned to the island when volcanic activity has ceased and the cloud forest has recovered. The Montserrat Government has to date refused to make a decision.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, 102(1), 12.

South America

New nature reserves in French Guyana

In 1998, two new nature reserves were created in French Guyana: the Anana

Nature Reserve (14,800 ha) protects a beach of international importance for nesting leatherback turtles *Dermochelys coriacea*; and the Kaw-Roura Nature Reserve (94,700 ha) is a wetland with one of the last populations of the endangered black caiman *Melanosuchus niger*. Both reserves have been also designated as Ramsar sites. At the end of 1998, there were five nature reserves in French Guyana (including a marine reserve) totalling 289,200 ha. A national park of about 3 million ha is currently under study and should be created by 2000–2001.

Source: *Lettre des Réserves Naturelles*, No. 18 (sent by David.Brugiere@univ-rennes1.fr)

Impoverishment of Amazonian forests

Current estimates of annual deforestation in Brazilian Amazonia capture less than half of the area that is impoverished each year by damage due to logging practices and surface fires. Both logging and fire increase forest vulnerability to future burning, and release forest carbon stocks to the atmosphere. If this forest impoverishment is to be controlled, then logging activities need to be restricted or replaced with low-impact timber-harvest techniques and more effective strategies to prevent accidental forest fires need to be implemented.

Source: Nepstad, D.C. *et al.* (1999) *Nature*, 398, 505–508.

Fourth Brazilian state red list

Four Brazilian states have now published official lists of threatened species, the most recent being Rio de Janeiro in June 1998. It includes 257 species: 3 Cnidaria (coelenterates), 7 molluscs, 13 crustaceans, 47 insects, 1 Diplopoda, 39 freshwater fishes, 9 marine fishes, 4 amphibians, 9 reptiles, 82 birds and 43 mammals. The first state to draw up a list was Paraná in February 1995, followed by Minas Gerais in January 1996 and São Paulo in February 1998.

Source: *Neotropical Primates*, 6(4), 129–130.

More sites for tall-grass bird

Several additional sites for the wet tall-grass tapaculo *Scytalopus iraiensis* have been found in the state of

Paraná, Brazil, and one in the neighbouring state of Santa Catarina (see *Oryx*, 33[1], 17). However, the population of this recently discovered species appears to be very small and is confined to areas that are under threat from development and farming. *Source: World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 5.

Frog benefits denied to Ecuador

A US-based pharmaceutical company, Abbot Laboratories, has developed a powerful painkiller, which has no side effects, whose active ingredient is derived from the poison secreted by poison-dart (or poison-arrow) frogs *Dendrobates* sp. found only in the foothills of the Ecuadorean Andes. Two Ecuadorean environmental organizations say that 750 poison-dart frogs were taken into the USA in 1996 without permission. The projected earnings from the new analgesic (ABT-594) have led Ecuador to seek to benefit from Abbot's discovery but Ecuador has no legal means for suing because the USA has not ratified international conventions dealing with biological resources.

Source: New Internationalist, April 1999, 6.

Sea cucumbers fished despite ban

Sea cucumbers continue to be collected illegally in the Galápagos Islands, Ecuador, and are being exported despite a ban introduced in 1998. According to a study by TRAFFIC most of the sea cucumbers are destined for East Asia; they are valued as a tonic food in China and as a celebration food in Taiwan. Only one of the 14 species of sea cucumber in the Galápagos is heavily exploited—*Isostichopus fuscus*.

Source: TRAFFIC, 24 February 1999.

Rediscovery of a brush-finch

The Critically Endangered pale-headed brush-finch *Atlapetes pallidiceps*, which had not been recorded since 1969, has been rediscovered. Six individuals were found in a remnant patch of forest in southern Ecuador.

Source: World Birdwatch, 21(1), 3.

A new bird from Peru

A new bird—the black-spectacled brush-finch *Atlapetes melanops*—has been described from central Peru. It inhabits humid scrub on both sides of

the deep canyon formed where the Río Mantaro intersects the eastern Andean ridge and probably has a very restricted range.

Source: Valqui, T. & Fjeldsa, J. (1999) Ibis, 141, 194–198.

Sustainable use of vicuña

A joint venture between local communities, conservationists and governments is safeguarding the vicuña *Vicugna vicugna* in the Andes of Bolivia by promoting fair trade and sustainable use of the species. In November 1999, during 3 days of field training, members of 12 local communities captured 90 vicuña in Ulla-Ulla Natural Reserve. They were taught how to handle and shear the animals with minimal stress. No animal was killed or injured during the operation. The animals are being monitored in the wild to discover whether capture and shearing have long-term effects. The data collected about the animal's response to management will provide the government with information to apply for the transfer of the species's status within the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora to permit the sustainable use of the species. The Bolivian Government agreed to include welfare recommendations in the management policies. The project is a joint effort by Oxford University, the National History Museum of La Paz and the Ministry of Sustainable Use of Bolivia, with technical advice and partial funding from Care for the Wild and the University Federation for Animal Welfare.

Source: Cristian Bonacic, Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS, UK.

A new Bolivian frog

A new species of frog in the genus *Telmatobius* has been described from 3050 m at Chuspipata, Provincia Nor-Yungas, Departamento La Paz, Bolivia. *Telmatobius ifornoi* differs from all known species of the genus, except for *T. yuracare*, by the presence of an externally projected humeral spine. The frog inhabits shallow streams in cloud forest on steep slopes.

Source: Amphibia-Reptilia, 20(1), 55–64.

Andean mountain cat

A study based on interviews with local people between 11 July and 1 August 1998 investigated the status of the Andean mountain cat *Oreailurus jacobita* in several protected areas in Chile and Bolivia. This cat, previously considered as very rare, appears to be present in four northern Chilean protected areas (Lauca; Las Vicuñas, Salar de Surire and Volcan Isluga) where local people are well aware of its existence. In south-west Bolivia and the Chilean region of Antofagasta records of this species are scarce, but the region has relatively few human inhabitants.

Source: Guillaume Chapron from Chapron, G. (1999) Recueil de Médecine Vétérinaire, 175(3/4), 119–125.

New frog from Chile and Argentina

A new frog species *Alsodes australis* has been described from temperate *Nothofagus* (southern beech) forest in southern Chile and Argentina. The genus is endemic to south-west South America and the new taxon was named *australis* because it is the southernmost known representative of the genus.

Source: Formas, J.R. et al. (1997) Studies of Neotropical Fauna & Environment, 32, 200–211.

Chilean endemic forest at risk

The ruil *Nothofagus alessandrii* forest, a rare and endemic temperate forest in central Chile, could disappear in 10 years. By 1999 only 352.2 ha of this forest type remained in 183 fragments surrounded by a matrix of *Pinus radiata* plantations. Only 42 ha of forest are protected in a public reserve. The forest is also being invaded by introduced species. Conservation efforts involving landowners and public agencies are required, both inside and outside protected areas. *Source: Bustamonte, R.O. & Castor, C. (1998) Biodiversity and Conservation*, 7, 1607–1626.

New plantain for Falklands

A new plant has been added to the list of plants endemic to the Falkland Islands. Moore's plantain *Plantago moorei* has been named after David Moore who found the plant in Port Stephens. Although he collected specimens in 1964, the plant was

described only recently, when Knud Rahn of the University of Copenhagen Botanical Garden examined known specimens of the Plantaginaceae from southern South America and recognized it as an undescribed species.

Source: *The Warrah* (from Falklands Conservation), No. 14, 3.

Pacific

Marquesan birds: losses and gains

Intensive searches for an endangered bird—the Marquesan monarch *Pomarea mendozae*—on the island of Ua Pou in the Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia, failed to locate any individuals, signalling the extinction of three of the four subspecies. The sole remaining population of 200–250 pairs is on the island of Mohotani off Hiva Oa. The endangered ultramarine lorikeet *Vini ultramarina* has been rediscovered on Nuku Hiva, another island of the group, with at least three, and possibly eight, birds sighted. In 1990 it was considered possibly extinct on the island, although it is abundant on Ua Huka, where it has been (re)introduced. Source: *World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 7.

Echidnas in New Guinea

A systematic revision of the genus *Zaglossus* has revealed unexpected morphological diversity. The genus is restricted to New Guinea and was regarded as monotypic but statistical and non-metric analysis indicates that three species can be recognized: the long-beaked echidna *Z. bruijnii*, which occurs west of the Paniai Lakes; *Z. bartoni*, which occurs in the central cordillera between the Paniai Lakes and the Nanneau Range as well as the Huon Peninsula; and *Z. attenboroughi* from the Cyclops Mountains in the

north. There are also four distinct subspecies of *Z. bartoni*. *Zaglossus* species are endangered throughout their range and attempts are being made to breed the only captive individuals at Taronga Zoo, Australia. The newly described *Z. attenboroughi* is known only from a single specimen collected from a single mountain summit in 1961, and may be extinct. Source: Flannery, T.F. & Groves, C.P. (1998), 62(3), 367–396.

Samoan community reserves

In a community-based extension programme, subsistence fishing villages in Samoa are adopting fisheries management plans incorporating a range of undertakings, from law enforcement regarding destructive fishing methods to protecting critical marine habitats. Within the first 18 months of the programme, the process had begun in 57 villages, 40 of which produced Fisheries Management Plans and 32 of these had chosen to establish Marine Protected Areas, the first community-owned marine reserves in the country. Source: King, M. & Faasili, U. (1999) *Naga, The ICLARM Quarterly*, April–June 1998, 34–38.

Australia/New Zealand/Antarctica

Action for toothfish

Australia is taking action to tackle the problem of overfishing for Patagonian toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides* by apprehending vessels fishing illegally in Australian sub-Antarctic territorial waters and by providing extra resources for surveillance. The illegal fishery is threatening the toothfish with commercial extinction as well as killing endangered albatrosses caught on longlines (see *Oryx*, 33[1], 19).

Australia is also proposing measures to stop illegal fishing to the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, including a catch certification scheme to prevent trade in fish caught illegally.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 38(2), 67–68.

Pure miners

The first colony of the Critically Endangered black-eared miner *Manorina melanotis* comprising solely pure-bred birds has been located at Gluepot Station, South Australia. Elsewhere this species is being swamped genetically by the yellow-throated miner *M. flavigula*. Source: *World Birdwatch*, 20(4), 5.

World Heritage Sites in sub-Antarctic

The New Zealand sub-Antarctic islands of Bounty, Snares, Auckland, Campbell and Antipodes were designated as World Heritage Sites in November 1998. They are internationally important for their seabird communities, including the endemic Campbell albatross *Diomedea eremita*, two endemic penguins and three endemic cormorants, all of which are globally threatened. Source: *World Birdwatch*, 21(1), 3.

People

Professor Brian Huntley was awarded WWF-South Africa's Gold Medal for 1998 in recognition of his outstanding contributions to environmental conservation.

The Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust was renamed the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust on 26 March 1999 as a tribute to its founder, Gerald Durrell.