# Briefly

## International

### America's Cup supports albatross conservation

In December 2002 representatives of America's Cup Syndicates, Whitbread Round the World Race and Volvo Ocean Race teams pledged their support for BirdLife International's Save the Albatross campaign at a press conference in Auckland, New Zealand. Yachtsmen representing four teams – OneWorld (USA), Alinghi (Italy), Team New Zealand and GBR Challenge – signed large postcards that were then sent to the New Zealand Minister of Fisheries and representatives of Australia, France, South Africa, Japan, Chile and Argentina encouraging controls on longlining. The albatross has long been an important symbol for yachtsmen and mariners. Coleridge's poem *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* famously describes the curse associated with killing an albatross.
*Source: World Birdwatch* (2003), **25**(1), 3.

### Concern over calls for more dams

Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, the Egyptian water minister and president of the World Water Council, has caused controversy by calling for the number of large dams around the world to be doubled in order to reach the UN's ambitious target of bringing clean water and sanitation to more than 1 billion more people in the coming decade. The statement was made at the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto in March 2003 and comes at a time when large dams have gone out of fashion because of their poor value for money and massive environmental impact. The World Bank, once the largest funder of dams, has not given any loans for new projects since the mid 1990s and has pulled out of the Narmada River project in India as well as refusing to fund the controversial Three Gorges Dam in China. The UN Environment Programme is launching a drive to encourage Asian governments to invest in rainwater harvesting and it believes it could help up to 2 billion people in Asia alone.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2387), 11.

### Half of the earth is still wilderness

A new report by Conservation International *Wilderness: Earth's Last Wild Places* suggests that despite mounting environmental threats, 46% of the Earth's land area remains largely intact wilderness. The study, involving more than 200 scientists from around the world, found that 68 million $km^2$ of land met 'wilderness' criteria, meaning that they have at least 70% of their original vegetation, contain fewer than five people per $km^2$ outside urban areas and have not been reduced to fragments of less than 10,000 $km^2$. More than one-third of the wilderness is Antarctic ice or Arctic tundra and only five of the 37 wilderness areas are conservation priorities. The five priority areas are Amazonia, New Guinea, the North American deserts, the Congo forests of Central Africa and the Miombo-Mopane grasslands of southern Africa.
*Source: World Watch* (2003), **16**(2), 9.

### Kyoto changes may increase deforestation

Proposed changes to the Kyoto Protocol could cause the widespread destruction of rainforests. This relates to the agreement to allow countries to meet their $CO_2$ emissions targets by planting forests that then soak up $CO_2$. Rules agreed in 2001 say that new forests can only qualify as carbon sinks if they are planted on land cleared before 1989, but several countries, including Japan and Canada, want to bring this deadline forward to 1999. Perversely, this flexibility in the deadline might encourage landowners to log forests in the hope of getting credit for replanting them later. There are huge amounts of money to be gained by using forests as carbon sinks and this gives landowners a real incentive to speculate on being able to claim carbon credits for land they deforest.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2387), 15.

### Every species has a 'barcode'

The DNA of every species has a unique barcode that would allow the identification of every animal to be made with ease, according to a scientist from Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York State. The barcode is written on a mitochondrial gene that codes for a protein called cytochrome c oxidase I. The aim is to develop an analytical tool so powerful that, with an afternoon's training, you could identify any species using a databank of barcodes. Some 500 species of butterflies and moths have already been identified using the DNA barcode system, but it has been estimated that making a global inventory of animal life would cost up to $2.5 billion and take up to 20 years.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2387), 14.

### New party to CITES

On 28 January 2003 the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya acceded to CITES, thus becoming the 161st party to the Convention. The accession came into force on 28 April 2003.
*Source: CITES Secretariat* (2003), 17 February 2003.

## Europe

### WWF rejects compromise on cod fishing

At the end of 2002, WWF called for a complete overhaul of the European Commission's Common Fisheries Policy as a way of saving cod stocks from extinction. Eventually a compromise was reached between various countries but this was rejected by WWF, who were particularly concerned that the total allowable catch of cod in the North Sea had been reduced by only 45%. In a recent report, WWF stated that they thought that drastic action was needed to allow fishing stocks to recover and to end overfishing. It called for a substantial cut in fish catches, a reduction in fishing effort, an end to subsidies that lead to more boats or more fishing, clear measures to reduce the size of the fishing fleet and long-term management for fish stocks.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46** (2), 155.

### Developers threaten Icelandic wilderness

Developers have begun work on a controversial hydroelectric power plant dam that will flood a significant area of unspoiled wilderness in north-east Iceland. The affected area includes Úthérad Important Bird Area which holds 0.5% of the global population of Arctic skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*. The Kárahnjúkar hydropower project is under construction to provide power for an aluminium smelter being built by the US company ALCOA. The Icelandic Planning Agency ruled against the scheme but this was overruled by the Icelandic Government. Conservationists are calling for the vast unspoiled eastern highlands to be declared a National Park.
*Source: World Birdwatch* (2003), **25**(1), 7.

### Global warming may be responsible for reindeer deaths

Recent research on the island of Spitsbergen suggests that global warming may be causing a chain of events that results in the deaths of reindeer. Warming causes more rain to fall onto snow-laden pastures, forming ice crusts over the soil surface that leave animals with nothing to eat. As well as Spitsbergen, animals in other permafrost areas such as Scandinavia, Siberia and Alaska are affected by this phenomenon, which can last for long periods. The situation is likely to get worse as global temperatures rise.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2385), 24.

### Help for British field crickets

On 21 August 2002 the Zoological Society of London and English Nature released 3,500 captive-bred British field crickets into the wild as part of a programme that will help augment the dwindling native population. In the late 1980s, the British field cricket population was down to less than 100 individuals in a single colony in West Sussex. In 1991, 3,000 crickets were released and since then a number of colonies have successfully established themselves in the short grasses and chalky/sandy soils in the south-east of England.
*Source: Lifewatch* (2002), **Autumn/Winter 2002**, 5.

### UK Government designates first No Take Zone

Lundy Island in Devon is the UK's only Marine Nature Reserve and recently the UK Government designated its first No Take Zone (NTZ) covering 3.3 km² of sea along the east side of the reserve. The zone was initially proposed by the Devon Sea Fisheries Committee and English Nature in July 2002 and has the support of local fishermen and other groups. The NTZ's long-term benefits include enhancing populations of fish and shellfish within and outside the NTZ, establishing a refuge for fish and shellfish, and increased benefits to the local economy including diving, tourism, research and fishing. Lundy is internationally important for its marine life and the 14 km² reserve contains the finest examples of rocky reefs in Britain.
*Source: English Nature Magazine* (2003), **66**, 5.

### Study to look at impact of *Prestige* oil spill

The Spanish Research Council (CSIC) is to spend €6 million to study the ecological impact of the *Prestige* oil spill off the coast of Spain in November 2002. The ship broke up and is now lying in two pieces in over 3,500 m of water. The 50,000 tons of oil that went down with the ship has been leaking at a rate of 150 tons a day. The immediate ecological impact of the spill was serious. Within 2 weeks of the sinking 15,000 seabirds were reported dead and more than 90% of the coastline of the Atlantic National Park was covered in oil. The CSIC study will look at four main aspects: firstly, the characteristics of the leaking oil and how quickly it will be released; secondly, the movement of oil patches in the open ocean; thirdly, identification of priority areas sensitive to toxins in the oil; and fourthly, the health of economically important species affected by the spill. In the wake of the disaster the European Union has at last prohibited single-hulled tankers, like the *Prestige*, in its waters though this does not take effect until 2010.
*Source: Frontiers in Ecology & the Environment* (2003), **1**(1), 5.

### Euro coin production leads to toxic waste in the sea

A state-owned company in Greece, LARCO, manufactures euros for the Greek government. Each year, LARCO deposits *c.* 1 million tons of ferronickel waste into the Mediterranean. Despite the fact that Greece has signed two international conventions banning the dumping of waste, this activity continues just inside Greece's own national waters. Studies have shown that dumping of toxic sludge in the area have damaged the marine environment but despite being ordered to use cleaner technologies and find safer disposal on land by the end of 2001, LARCO continues to dump at sea.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(1), 3.

## North Eurasia

### Pipeline threat to Lake Baikal

The Russian oil giant Yukos is planning to build a 2,400 km oil pipeline from Angarsk in Siberia to Datsin in China, running right across the Tunkinsky National Park in Buryatia on the south shore of Lake Baikal. The park is covered by pristine tundra and is home to species such as the snow leopard and Siberian ibex. Local campaigners also fear the contamination of the famous Tunkinskaya hot springs and Lake Baikal itself, as the pipeline crosses an area with high levels of seismic activity and mountainous regions with severe climatic conditions. It is argued that the environmental impact assessment of the scheme has been inadequate – for example it values a musk deer and a wild boar at 30 roubles (less than $1) and a hare at 2 roubles (5 cents), while agricultural land that will be used for pipeline construction is not mentioned at all.
*Source: Taiga News* (2003), **42**, 3.

### Reproductive collapse in saiga antelope harems

The saiga antelope *Saiga tatarica tatarica* is a nomadic inhabitant of the semi-arid areas of Central Asia. The saiga's horns, borne only by the males, are highly valued in Chinese traditional medicine and this has led to heavy poaching. In 2002 the global population of saiga was 50,000 individuals and this led to its listing as Critically Endangered. A recent study in Kalmykia, Russia has shown that along with a rapid decline in the population there was a sudden drop in fecundity in 2001. This was probably caused by a catastrophic drop in the number of adult males in this harem-breeding ungulate, probably due to selective poaching for their horns. This



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has clear implications for the future conservation of this species (see also *Oryx*, **35**(4), 340–345, and *Oryx*, **36**(4), 323).
*Source: Nature* (2003), **422**(6928), 135.

### Russia holds the key to the Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol will come into effect globally if Russia ratifies it. Observers are waiting anxiously to see if President Putin and his government ratify the treaty. Russia has promised to do so this year, but there are signs of wavering in the government. Russia could make up to $20 billion a year through emissions trading and would gain much kudos from allowing the much troubled treaty to come into force. Russian campaigners are seeking international support for their pro-Kyoto campaign.
*Source: Taiga News* (2003), **42**, 2.

## North Africa and Middle East

### Turkey's great bustard population smaller than previously thought

In 2002 the RSPB, BirdLife International and the Dutch Government's Ministry of Agriculture funded a survey of the great bustard *Otis tarda*, a globally threatened species, in eastern Turkey. Only 251 great bustards were counted in eastern Anatolia giving a minimum total estimate for the whole country of 500 birds. This is well below previous estimates of 800–3,000 breeding pairs in Turkey. The largest group of 145 birds was found in the Bulanik Important Bird Area, a site threatened by the construction of a dam. The main threat to the species is overgrazing, but hunting and human disturbance are also significant problems. A draft national action plan for the great bustard is due to be produced this year.
*Source: Sandgrouse* (2003), **25**(1), 6.

### Future bleak for Iraq's environment

To date no government or UN agency has assessed the environmental impact of war on Iraq. The shores of the Gulf, which provided access for troops, are one of the top five sites in the world for wading birds. Not all environmental damage will come from obvious sources. Convoys of vehicles across the desert create their own damage by breaking up the thin surface that protects it from erosion. At particular risk of pollution are Iraq's rivers, particularly the Tigris and the Euphrates. Pollution could come from seepage from bombed chemical plants and damage to sewage infrastructure. The targeting of industrial and military sites may have caused release of toxins. Another threat is from depleted uranium (DU) used to tip armour-piercing shells. Nobody knows how dangerous DU residues are although a recent UNEP trip to Bosnia-Herzegovina revealed that DU had left ''significant radiological hotspots''.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2386), 12–13.

### Captive breeding success for Arabian leopard

In 2002 the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, witnessed two births of the Critically Endangered Arabian leopard *Panther pardus nimr*. There are currently 38 Arabian leopards in captivity of whom 19 are wild caught. However, less than 30% of wild-caught individuals have bred successfully. Current estimates place the global wild population at 82–250.
*Source: International Zoo News* (2003), **50**(1), 43.

## Sub-Saharan Africa

### The unsustainability of charcoal production

Charcoal is a major source of fuel in East and Southern Africa but its production is largely unsustainable. A new study by TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa in Nairobi has looked at charcoal production and assessed the feasibility of using biomass wastes as a substitute for wild-produced lumpwood charcoal. Nairobi consumes approximately 91,250 tonnes of charcoal each year which equates to the destruction of 900,000 tonnes of green wood annually. Charcoal typically passes through four middlemen before it is consumed and the profits involved are substantial. Charcoal is the second highest contributor to Kenya's Gross National Product. There has been little progress in promoting sustainability in most parts of the industry. The study revealed that new carbonizing technology for converting biomass waste such as sugar cane bagasse, rice and coffee husks, and maize stover into charcoal briquettes could substantially contribute to replacing unsustainable lumpwood charcoal.
*Source: TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2003), **20**, 13.

### New information about why lions attack humans

It has been traditionally thought that lions that started to attack humans and livestock did so because they were sick or injured and thus unable to hunt fleet-footed prey such as zebras and gazelles. New evidence suggests that most man-eating lions are young males in good physical health. In 1898 two lions famously killed nearly 30 people in the Tasvo River area of Kenya. The Tsavo lions had broken teeth and jaws and it was theorized that tooth damage and dental disease made the lions hunt slower prey such as humans. A recent study of 23 'problem lions' killed by rangers on the borders of the Tsavo East National Park suggests that young males expelled from their natural prides are leaving the Park's boundaries in search of territory and are encountering a growing population of humans and livestock. It may be too much for a lion to resist.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2382), 14.

### Black and white colobus in Kakamega are not declining

In *Oryx* (**34**(4), 247) it was reported that eastern black and white colobus or guerezas *Colobus guereza* had declined dramatically at the Isecheno study site in the Kakamega Forest, Kenya. An intensive recent survey of the population at Isecheno suggests that far from declining the population may actually be increasing. It has been suggested that the decline reported in the 1990s may not have taken place and the survey also highlights the difficulties of accurately determining primate distributions and densities in rainforest environments.
*Source: African Zoology* (2002), **37**(2), 119–126.

### Bonobos are victims of war in the Congo

War in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo has left more than 2.5 million people dead and led to the wholesale destruction of habitat. The impact on



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bonobos *Pan paniscus* has been severe. Bonobos categorized as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, only live in remote lowland forests south of the Congo River and this area has been the frontline for warring factions. A recent survey in the area revealed numerous snares and hunting camps, evidence that hunting of animals for bushmeat was rife. The Salonga National Park is a major refuge for bonobos but much of their home range remains unprotected and threatened by logging.
*Source: Frontiers in Ecology & the Environment* (2003), **1**(1), 8.

### Concern over Ebola threat to great apes

In the last 5–6 years there has been an outbreak of Ebola virus that has covered tens of thousands of square kilometres in Congo and Gabon. The virus is particularly virulent and causes death in 50–90% of cases. The disease not only affects humans but also great apes, and it is thought that thousands of great apes have died as a result of the current outbreak. In December 2002 the Ebola virus killed six gorillas in Lossi, a sanctuary south of the Odzala National Park. Ebola is currently threatening the area containing possibly the largest remaining population of western lowland gorillas. The transmission of the virus from the forest near the villages follows the contact between hunters and great apes. Managing the current situation is made more difficult by constant political and social instability.
*Source:* http://www.iucn.org/info_and_news/press/grapes210303.pdf (press release of 21 March 2003).

### Zimbabwe's land reforms threaten amphibians

The land reform policy of the Zimbabwe Government has led to a considerable modification of the environment that has affected, amongst other groups, amphibians. Indigenous forest is being lost at an alarming rate and uncontrolled fires have burnt a high percentage of former commercial farming areas. Stream bank cultivation is widespread as is overgrazing of remaining grasslands. These factors have led to soil moisture deficits, excess runoff of rainwater, siltation of rivers and dams, diminished water tables and progressive desertification. This will undoubtedly affect amphibians.
*Source: Froglog* (2003), **55**, 2.

### Okavango Delta threatened

The Okavango Delta is Botswana's principal Important Bird Area (IBA) and is the world's largest Ramsar site. It could be irreversibly damaged if plans go ahead to build a weir on the Okavango River in Namibia. The Namibian Power Company, NamPower, is investigating the feasibility of generating hydroelectric power by constructing a 6–8 m high weir at Popa Falls. The weir would have a devastating effect on the delta by trapping sediment that is an essential part of the delta's ecosystem. Studies by the Okavango Research Group have shown that this sediment plays a key role in maintaining the varied and productive nature of this inland oasis. A similar effect has been reported from schemes such as the Kariba and Cahora Bassa Dams and their effect on the Zambezi Delta.
*Source: World Birdwatch* (2003), **25**(1), 5.

### Mixed fortunes for the Seychelles kestrel

The Seychelles kestrel *Falco araea* is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, with a population of <1,000 birds. It is confined to the islands of Mahé, Praslin, Silhouette and some of Mahé's satellite islands. A recent survey, the most comprehensive since the 1970s, has revealed a dramatic decline in species numbers on Praslin, although the population on Mahé has remained stable. In late 2002 only four pairs and one single bird were located on Praslin. It is thought that vulnerability to predators and some local persecution are responsible for its small population on the island. In 2003 predator-proof nestboxes will be installed in current and recently used kestrel territories on Praslin and an awareness campaign will be implemented by the Wildlife Clubs of Seychelles.
*Source: Africa – Birds & Birding* (2003), **8**(2), 16.

### South African park threatened by oil spill

On 12 September 2002 the Italian flagged *Jolly Rubino* ran aground on a coral reef about 300 m from Cape St Lucia close to the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park in South Africa. At the time the ship was carrying 400,000 gallons of diesel and fuel oil and a pollution control aircraft reported oil emanating from the ship's hull. The wetland park was designated a World Heritage Site in 2000 and its marine conservation area is a nesting site for Critically Endangered leatherback turtles.
*Source: Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2003), **99**, 35.

### South Africa takes action on longlining

The South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has taken a step to reduce the incidental catch of seabirds, especially albatrosses, in longlining operations. It has announced a National Plan of Action that sets out the required mitigation measures to reduce the mortality of seabirds to below an interim level of 0.05 birds per thousand hooks by South Africa's four longline fisheries for hake, tuna and swordfish, Patagonian toothfish and sharks.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(3), 274.

### Seychelles giant tortoises finally breed in captivity

The Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles began its tortoise and terrapin conservation in 1997 but it wasn't until November 2002 that the first Seychelles giant tortoise egg hatched. The egg came from the youngest female, 16 years old, and the oldest male, >100 years old. The first hatchling was named Gerry after Gerald Durrell. A second hatchling arrived a few days after the first.
*Source: International Zoo News* (2003), **50**(1), 45–46.

### Only four ancestral species for Madagascar's mammals

Madagascar split from mainland Africa 165 million years ago and the 100 or so terrestrial mammal species that live there are unique. A new study suggests that all the mammals of modern Madagascar are descended from just four ancestral species. Scientists have compared the genetic variation of seven living carnivorous mammal species on Madagascar with carnivores elsewhere. This shows that the Malagasy carnivores had a single common ancestor whose closest living relative is the African mongoose. Work on lemurs has also shown a single common ancestor and it is thought that the remaining species groups, rodents and tenrecs, will show a similar pattern. None of these species could have swum the 400 km from Africa so they probably arrived by clinging to lumps of floating vegetation.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2382), 14.

## South and South-east Asia

### A new method of detecting 'dynamite fishing'

The use of dynamite for fishing is a serious threat to coral reefs in South-east Asia but the frequency with which this method is used is largely unknown. A new study has aimed to develop a detection system capable of distinguishing underwater explosions from background noise. The radius of detection may be as high as 50 km depending on the mass of charges being used. It is hoped that such a detection system would help determine the scale of the problem, identify areas at greatest risk and quantify the effectiveness of management intervention designed to control destructive fishing practices.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(1), 99–106.

### Two new deer species for India

In November 2002 the Wildlife Conservation Society organized an expedition to the remote forests of eastern Arunachal Pradesh in India with the aim of surveying for large mammals. The project resulted in two new additions to the large mammal fauna of India, the leaf deer *Muntiacus putaoensis* and the black barking deer *Muntiacus crinifrons*. Prior to the survey the leaf deer was known to occur only in a small area of Myanmar while the black barking deer was recorded from south-east China and Myanmar. These discoveries represent the first additions to the large mammal fauna of the Indian subcontinent for perhaps 100 years.
*Source: Current Science* (2003), **84**(3), 101–102.

### Bats protected by Indian law for the first time

Until recently fruit bats in India were listed as vermin under Schedule V of the Wildlife (Protection) Act which meant that there was no protection available and no mechanism for prosecuting anyone who killed or captured fruit bats. On 30 September 2002, following a long period of lobbying, two bat species were upgraded to Schedule I. Part 1 of the Act. Wroughton's free-tailed bat *Otomops wroughtoni* and Salim Ali's fruit bat *Latidens salimalii* are both highly threatened and it is hoped that their protection will eventually lead to all fruit bats being removed from Schedule V.
*Source: Bat Net – CCINSA Newsletter* (2003), **4**(1), 9.

### Irrawaddy dolphin may vanish from the Ayeyarwady River

A recent scientific survey by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, the Myanmar Departments of Fisheries and Forests, and Yangon University suggests that the Irrawaddy dolphin may disappear from the Ayeyarwady River (formerly the Irrawaddy) without efforts to protect it from human activities. It is estimated that only a few tens of dolphins remain in the river. They are much favoured by fishermen because of their habit of working cooperatively to drive fish into the range of throw nets.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(3), 273–274.

### New publication on Important Bird Areas in Vietnam

BirdLife International has recently launched a publication *Key Sites for Conservation in Vietnam* that lists all of the Important Bird Areas in the country. More than half of these sites are in protected areas. However, 68% of the sites are threatened by agricultural intensification. This threat is particularly serious for wetlands, including coastal mudflats and wet grasslands in the Mekong Delta. But there are some positive signs. At Ha Nam Island, the local people, shrimp farmers, the police and other stakeholders have drawn up a plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of the area.
*Source:* http://www.birdlife.net/news/pr/2003/03/vietnam.html

### *Pseudonovibos spralis* never existed?

In 2001 it was argued that a new bovine species *Pseudonovibos spiralis* had been found in Vietnam. This discovery fuelled a lot of debate over the validity of the identification. It is suggested that horns supposedly belonging to *P. spiralis* are in fact from buffalo or domestic cattle and have been treated to alter their appearance. Recent DNA tests on horns have tended to support the view that several specimens of *P. spiralis* are in fact domestic cattle. Until a specimen of *P. spiralis* is made available for definitive testing pertaining to possible alteration, the suggestion will be that this species never existed.
*Source: Journal of Zoology* (2003), **259**(2), 169–170.

### CITES and timber trade – the need for coordination

In October 2002 TRAFFIC published a report *In Harmony with CITES* that focused on Malaysia as a case study to review the challenges to effective implementation of a CITES timber listing, and recommended approaches to overcome the perceived and actual constraints. The report identifies the great need for coordination between agencies that are implementing CITES regulations. Such coordination is vital in enhancing enforcement efforts for timber species and ensuring that the relevant agencies can improve their ability to control and prosecute timber-related crimes. More research is needed to gather information that will help determine if trade in CITES-listed species is detrimental to the survival of that species. The report identifies a number of steps that would help countries counter the misconception that CITES is just an international trade ban.
*Source: TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2003), **20**, 3.

## East Asia

### Black-faced spoonbills in botulism outbreak

At least 73 black-faced spoonbills *Platalea minor* have died following an outbreak of avian botulism at the birds' main wintering site at Tseng-wen estuary, Taiwan. Prior to this setback, the population of this Critically Endangered species was about 900, most of whom (*c.* 640) wintered in Tseng-wen. Prompt action by government authorities, NGOs and volunteers allowed the situation to be brought rapidly under control. Outbreaks of avian botulism are relatively common amongst waterbirds but the concern is that once the disease has broken out in an area there is a danger that it can easily recur. Careful monitoring of water quality can forewarn of potential problems and precautions can be taken such as removing all sick birds and vertebrate carcasses from the area at times of high risk.
*Source: World Birdwatch* (2003), **25**(1), 2.



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### Taiwan addresses seabird bycatch

The Taiwanese Government has taken significant steps to address the problem of seabird bycatch from legally operated Taiwan-owned fishing vessels. The government is to fund an on-board observer programme that will monitor the level of seabird bycatch on vessels. Already six observers have been deployed in the Southern Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. A National Plan of Action has been prepared and all Taiwanese vessels legally fishing south of 30°S are required to use bird-scaring lines and to set lines only at night. More than 500 Taiwanese-owned longline vessels operate legally worldwide, targeting various species of tuna. A further 169 Taiwanese-owned vessels operate under a Flag of Convenience outside Taiwan's domestic legislation. The Taiwanese and Japanese authorities are collaborating on an Action Plan to deter Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported fishing vessels that operate under a Flag of Convenience. These boats are undoubtedly responsible for killing large numbers of seabirds.
*Source: World Birdwatch* (2003), **25**(1), 6.

### Land secured for red-crowned cranes

A generous donation of ¥100 million has allowed the Wild Bird Society of Japan to purchase and manage 368 ha of wetland and adjacent forest in eastern Hokkaido for the red-crowned crane *Grus japonensis*. The area, on the shore of Lake Furen, Nemuro City, is a breeding site for this Endangered species. This is the seventh private reserve for red-crowned cranes established by the Society through land purchase in Hokkaido since 1987 and brings the total area protected to 1,057 ha.
*Source: World Birdwatch* (2003), **25**(1), 7.

### Success for dolphin conservation in Japan

The village of Futo in Japan has been well known as a centre for dolphin fishing using the technique of 'drive hunting'. In the past dolphins have been mainly killed by drive hunting but more recently the dolphinarium industry has used this method as a way of capturing live animals for display in captivity. However, the most recent drive hunting season has ended without the deaths of any dolphins and this is in part due to the organization instead of commercial whale and dolphin-watching trips from Futo. These trips have proved a great success and it is hoped that the idea of dolphin-watching will spread to other areas of Japan that are currently involved in drive hunting.
*Source:* http://www.wdcs.org (news item of 14 April 2003).

## North America

### Yukon Government halts protection of wilderness

After only 3 months in power, the new Yukon Government has effectively stopped the further protection of wilderness by halting work on the Yukon Protected Areas Strategy that began in 1992. The government is the only jurisdiction in Canada to renege on commitments to protect wilderness, biodiversity and wildlife. The Yukon is home to some of Canada's largest woodland and hosts healthy populations of grizzly bears and wolves.
*Source: Taiga News* (2003), **42**, 3.

### Canada's most famous park is criticized

Banff National Park in Alberta is Canada's oldest and most famous National Park but a recent study has suggested that it is not adequately protecting its population of black bears. A survey of 25 black bears, about half of the park's population, showed that the annual survival rate was 84% which is no better than unprotected populations. Of the 'problem bears', those that have become accustomed to humans, one in three die each year, a higher proportion than in several hunted populations outside the Park. It is suggested that the main cause of this problem is the increasing numbers of tourists using the Park and the interests of the public being put above those of the animals.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2383), 9.

### Success in Quebec

In February 2003 the Quebec Government announced protection for nearly 4,000 km² of the Moisie River watershed. The Mosie river runs 400 km from the Labrador Plateau south to the St Lawrence at Sept-Iles. The Moisie is one of North America's most productive salmon rivers and in its lower reaches passes through virtually unexploited boreal forest. The designation is the result of a 20-year campaign by the local Association pour la Protection de la Rivière Moisie and a coalition of provincial and national groups.
*Source: Taiga News* (2003), **42**, 3.

### Bush's climate proposals under fire

The National Research Council, one of the US's leading scientific organizations, has criticized the new Climate Change Science Program that has been established by the Bush administration following its withdrawl from the Kyoto Protocol. The US claimed that more research was needed into global warming. The NRC believes that the draft plan lacks most of the basic elements of a strategic plan and overlooks a lot of existing science as a way of claiming there is more uncertainty that there really is. For example, the draft fails to consider that consumers may affect climate change by actions such as energy and water conservation and the use of mass transport. It also fails to acknowledge research into how burning, logging and clearing of forests releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. It remains to be seen how much heed will be taken of the Council's criticisms.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2385), 9.

### Good news for dolphins chasing tuna

The fishing industry practice of encircling dolphins to catch tuna no longer has an adverse impact on dolphin populations in the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean (ETP) according to the US National Marine Fisheries Service. This change reflects hard work by US and international fishermen of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission to substantially reduce dolphin deaths and create a sustainable fishery. From now on tuna harvested in the ETP by large purse seine vessels can be labelled ''dolphin-safe'' even if dolphins are encircled, so long as no dolphins are killed or seriously injured during the set in which the tuna were caught.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(2), 156.

### Decline in acid rain deposition in the US

A recent report by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has shown a large and widespread decrease in acid



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rain (wet sulphate deposition) across broad areas of northern New England, the New York region and the Upper Midwest. The amount of wet sulphate deposited in lakes and streams nationally declined by *c.* 40% in the 1990s. This can be linked to declines in emissions and depositions of sulphur that have occurred since the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, which created the EPA's Acid Rain Program. Despite these declines, the New England region has not seen a significant decline in the number of acidic lakes and streams, which may be due to the area's unique soil chemistry. In January 2003 President Bush proposed a 'Clear Skies' plan to further reduce power plant emissions over the next 15 years.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(3), 273.

### Continued moves to prevent turtles drowning in shrimp nets

The US Government requires shrimping vessels to use Turtle Excluder Devices to protect sea turtles. However, larger turtles cannot pass through the Device openings and drown. Despite proposing a rule to require larger Devices, the National Marine Fisheries Service has yet to implement this change. A number of environmental groups are now threatening to sue the Service if it fails to issue the final regulation. Many shrimpers could alter their nets at a cost of $20 and for those who have to buy new equipment, the cost would be from $40–200.
*Source: Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2003), **99**, 32.

### Ice Age relict plant is saved from extinction

Robbin's or dwarf cinquefoil *Potentilla robbinsiana* is an Ice Age relict plant found only in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. It was put on the US Endangered Species List in 1980 when the known population was only 3,700 plants. There are now more than 14,000 plants and the species has been removed from the federal list. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the US Forest Service, the Appalachian Mountain Club and the New England Wild Flower Society formed a partnership to rescue the species. Disturbance by walkers was reduced by re-routing a major trail while new populations were successfully reintroduced to suitable sites in the White Mountain National Forest. The USFWS will monitor the cinquefoil's status for at least 5 years to address any unexpected decline in the population.
*Source: Plant Talk* (2003), **23**, 18.

### Senate upholds ban on drilling in Alaska refuge

On 19 March 2003 the US Senate passed an amendment to the Senate budget bill that effectively ended current plans for oil exploration in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. President Bush had pressed for exploration to be authorized, arguing that increasing domestic supplies would reduce the US dependence on foreign supplies. The result, passed by 52 votes to 48, is a victory for environmental groups who had campaigned hard against the proposal. The Bush administration could still attempt to pursue drilling plans but would probably struggle to find the necessary level of support following this vote.
*Source: Nature* (2003), **422**(6930), 366.

### Bison killings continue outside Yellowstone National Park

The annual slaughter of bison that stray outside Yellowstone National Park in Montana has brought criticism from those who fear that as many as 1,000 animals may be slaughtered before spring 2003. Bison that stray on to public land can be killed as part of a scheme to prevent the spread of brucellosis to livestock, although this transmission has never been recorded in the wild. Since 1995 the state of Montana has had permission from the US Department of Agriculture to kill bison. In the unusually cold winter of 1996–1997 many bison roamed outside of Yellowstone in search of food and 1,083 were slaughtered.
*Source: National Parks* (2003), **77**(1–2), 22.

### No-fishing zones declared in Channel Islands

The California Fish and Game Commission has decided to make 67 km$^2$ of ocean surrounding the Channel Islands off-limits to fishing. This creates the largest marine reserve area in the continental United States. It is hoped this will help reverse the alarming decline in several marine species such as red snapper, abalone and angel sharks. Scientists have concluded that no-take zones are a good way to rebuild fish stocks by allowing animals to reproduce (see also *Oryx*, **37**(2), 166–177). The Channel Islands Marine Sanctuary, the ocean surrounding the islands, sits between warm and cold water streams, offering exceptional habitat and breeding areas for aquatic creatures including 20 endangered or threatened species. This sanctuary covers 580 km$^2$.
*Source: National Parks* (2003), **77**(1–2), 24.

### Oldest living tree is to be cloned

A 4,767 year old bristlecone pine *Pinus longaeva*, known as Methuselah, holds the record of being the oldest living tree. The US Forest Service and the Champion Tree Project International are to attempt to clone the tree. Bristlecone pines have flourished for thousands of years atop the arid mountains of the Great Basin from Colorado to California. These ancient trees are characterized by large areas of die-back or dead wood and thin strips of living bark. Methuselah was discovered in 1957 at an elevation of 3,048 m in the White Mountains of California. Saplings are cloned from tissue samples of trees and then planted in 'archival living libraries' at selected places.
*Source: Plant Talk* (2003), **23**, 16.

### Submarines can be used for monitoring declining fish stocks

Fish stocks are currently estimated by measuring the size of sample catches, but the figures obtained can be misleading. Scientists at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in Gloucester Point have developed an Autonomous Underwater Vehicle that takes sonar pictures of passing fish shoals, recognizes the species present and counts them. The idea is that these vehicles could be deployed to count shoals in many different areas at once, giving a more reliable estimate of the size of fish stocks. The vehicles move at 1–2 m sec$^{-1}$ and can travel up to 100 km before their batteries need recharging.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2382), 16–17.

### Non-native seaweed smothering Florida's coral reefs

A non-native seaweed *Caulerpa brachypus* has become so thick on reefs in Florida's Palm Beach County that it is forcing lobsters and fish away. The seaweed's vigorous growth smothers and kills the coral and also covers the food on which many fish rely. It can also fill in the ledges and crannies that attract lobsters. The species was first recorded in the area about a year ago and was probably



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inadvertently released from a saltwater aquarium or from a ship's ballast water. Because it is non-native, it has no natural predators. Despite its potential for serious economic impact, there is currently no scientific information available on how fast the species is spreading.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(3), 272–273.

### International protection for Florida Key coral reefs

In November 2002 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration created a zone known as the Florida Keys Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. This area stretches from Biscayne National Park to the Tortugas and encompasses all of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. As of December 2002 ships longer than 50 m will be held to internationally accepted and enforced rules. More than 40% of the world's commerce passes through the Florida Straits each year and the potential for damage has been high. The new zone takes into account the interests of shipping and commerce by allowing ships to continue to navigate through the area.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(1), 4.

### Rarest Hawaiian forest bird almost extinct

In February 2003 biologists flew into Hanawi Natural area Reserve on the island of Maui in an attempt to capture the last three remaining Po'o-uli *Melamprosops phaeosoma*, the rarest forest bird in Hawaii. This species is a member of the Hawaiian honeycreeper family and is the only Hawaiian forest bird to rely on native tree snails for its food. It was not discovered by modern scientists until 1973. Only three birds, a male and two females, have been found in recent years and if this operation is successful, the birds will be taken to the Maui Bird Conservation Centre in Olinda, which is operated by the Zoological Society of San Diego.
*Source: 'Elepaio* (2003), **63**(2), 12.

### Rare turtle nest in Hawaii

On 7 October 2002 an olive ridley turtle deposited 124 eggs on a busy beach in Hilo, Hawaii. This is believed to be the first nest laid on this beach in modern times and is only the second record of an olive ridley turtle in the State of Hawaii. The nest will continue to be monitored by University of Hawaii at Hilo Marine Option Program students, Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Conservation and the state Division of Aquatic Resources.
*Source: Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2003), **99**, 34.

## Central America and Caribbean

### Conservation success for leatherback turtles in the British Virgin Islands

Three species of turtles are regularly found in the waters of the British Virgin Islands – the hawksbill *Eretmochelys imbricata*, the green *Chelonia mydas* and the leatherback *Dermochelys coriacea*. All have been subject to harvest and the leatherback in particular has been the focus of island hunters. Since 1988 the Conservation and Fisheries Department of the Government has been conducting annual monitoring surveys of leatherback nesting beaches. It is clear that the number of leatherbacks in the British Virgin Islands is very low but appears to be increasing. There were 63 verified nesting activities in 2001, an all-time high. Changes in local legislation and increasing law enforcement have undoubtedly benefited the leatherbacks.
*Source: Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2003), **99**, 5–7.

## South America

### Colombia designates first Important Bird Area

In November 2002 Ecoparque Los Besotes became the first site in Colombia to be designated as an Important Bird Area. Los Besotes is an area of *c.* 500 ha about 9 km from Valledupar and is part of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, an isolated mountain chain close to the Caribbean that hosts many endemic species. More than 150 bird species are recorded from Los Besotes including Andean condor *Vultur gryphus*, blue-knobbed curassow *Crax alberti*, military macaw *Ara militaris* and white-lored warbler *Basileuterus conspicillatus*, all nationally threatened species. Thanks to the recognition of Los Besotes as an Important Bird Area, the local government has provided the funds to purchase an additional 1,100 ha of land.
*Source: World Birdwatch* (2003), **25**(1), 3.

### Greater impact of low-intensity forest fires

A recent study of Amazonian forests has suggested the long-term impact of low-intensity fires may be greater than previously thought (see also *Oryx*, **37**(1), 97–109). Prior to this study, work had suggested that ground fires during severe El Niño events could contribute around 5% of all annual carbon emissions from anthropogenic sources but it is argued that these short-term studies did not take account of post-burn mortality over the longer term. The study in the central Brazilian Amazon has shown significant increases in tree mortality by year 3. It could be that fires could contribute as much as 10–25% of all annual carbon emissions from anthropogenic sources, though levels of uncertainty remain high.
*Source: Frontiers in Ecology & the Environment* (2003), **1**(1), 6.

## Pacific

### Most *Partula* species are extinct in French Polynesia

A recent survey by the Zoological Society of London has revealed that the status of *Partula* snails in French Polynesia is far worse than was previously thought. These snails are as important in the study of evolution as are Darwin's finches and there are now thought to be only four species out of an original 61 remaining (see also *Oryx*, **37**(1), 91–96). The cause of the decline has primarily been a misguided attempt in the 1970s to use a predatory snail *Euglandia rosea* to control another alien species, the African land snail, in Tahiti. The predatory snail had little impact on the African land snail, feeding instead off native species of *Partula*. Twelve *Partula* species now exist only in captivity although hopes have been raised slightly by the discovery of a small population of an as yet unidentified *Partula* in a remote area of the island of Moorea.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **178**(2389), 10.

## Australia/Antarctica/ New Zealand

### Threat to Great Barrier Reef from tourist island

A cruise company is planning to build a tourist island on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Plans include a four-storey building, cafes and a conference centre. The island would be located about 50 km east of Cairns in the Morre Reef Area. Representatives of the company behind the scheme, Sunlover Cruises, have been in discussion with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority for 12 months and have submitted an environmental impact assessment. Opponents of the scheme are concerned that temperature fluctuations caused by the moving shadow of the buildings and nutrient-rich effluent could have a negative impact on the reef. The project may be approved by the end of 2003 and if it is, the Wilderness Society will challenge it in court.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2386), 11.

### Increased protection for Great Barrier Reef

The Australian Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust has recently provided A $150,000 from their Coastal Catchments Initiative to help improve the water quality of the rivers of the Douglas Shire and the Great Barrier Reef. The aim is to address sediment and nutrient loads from the Daintree and Mossman Rivers and the Mowbray and Salt Water creeks. All of these rivers are depositing over 100,000 tonnes of sediment, 730 tonnes of nitrogen and 78 tonnes of phosphorus into the Reef each year. This Water Quality Improvement Plan, developed in association with the State Government, regional organizations, local industry and the community, is expected to be completed in April 2004.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(3), 272.

### A new approach to identifying marine pests in Australia

Introduced marine organisms continue to be a threat to coastal resources worldwide. A new technique has been tried in Australia for the identification of potential marine pests that may arrive via ballast water and/or hull fouling. The study identified 851 introduced marine species from around the world and then used selection criteria to develop a new pest list. The criteria were: (a) the species has been reported in a shipping vector or has a ship-mediated invasion history, (b) the vector still exists, (c) the species is responsible for economic or environmental harm, and (d) it is exotic to Australia or present in Australia but subject to official control. A total of 33 species identified in the initial review satisfied all selection criteria.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(1), 91–98.

### Ant control saves land crabs on Christmas Island

Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean is dominated by land crabs that are a vital part of the island's ecosystem. However, almost a third of the estimated 45 million red land crabs have been killed by yellow crazy ants, named as such for their frenetic movements. Crazy ants appeared on the island in the 1930s and underwent a population explosion in the 1990s. Densities of ants are now as high as 70 million ants per ha. The Australian government, Environment Australia and Monash University in Melbourne have used poisoned bait in an attempt to reduce ant numbers. In some cases they have been able to get a reduction of 99.4% in ant activity. Monitoring will continue and the exercise repeated if ant numbers explode again.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **178**(2389), 11.

### New trust to help the blue duck

The blue duck or whio is endemic to New Zealand. There are only about 2,500 remaining and the species is categorized as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. The blue duck is specifically adapted for life on clean, fast-flowing rivers and streams. The main threat to the species' survival is predation, particularly by stoats. In August 2002 the Central North Island Blue Duck Conservation Trust was established following negotiations with Genesis Power Ltd who are seeking to continue operating the Tongariro Power Development. As part of a mitigation agreement, A $1.5 million will be paid to the trust over 10 years and this will be used to mitigate any ongoing environmental effects on the blue duck resulting from the continued operation of the Tongariro Power Development. It is planned to create new self-sustaining populations of blue duck, not necessarily limited to the Tongariro region.
*Source: Forest & Bird* (2003), **307**, 4.

### Parrot trade potentially disastrous for native birds in New Zealand

Biologists have reacted angrily to suggestions that exotic parrots should be imported legally into New Zealand in order to curb smuggling. In October 2002 a number of parrots were found to be suffering from exotic psitticine (parrot) pox, a disease that could spread to populations of wild introduced parrots such as rosella and from there to native species. Parrot pox virus could cause the extinction of the kakapo as well as significant mortality for other native parrots including kaka, kea and kakariki. The trade in exotic parrots was suspended in July 1997 and no permits for importing them have been issued since then. Smuggling continues to pose a serious threat to bio-security.
*Source: Forest & Bird* (2003), **307**, 6.

### Icebergs threaten penguin colony

The movements of two gigantic Antarctic icebergs appear to have restricted the number of emperor penguins living and breeding in a colony at Cape Crozier. Aerial observations have shown that the colony has scattered into at least five subgroups. Two years ago the colony had about 2,400 adult penguins but since then ice conditions produced by collisions of the two giant bergs have greatly reduced the number of breeding pairs. The colony is of historical interest. In 1911 three members of Captain Scott's ill-fated expedition hauled a sledge 60 miles from Cape Evans to Cape Crozier to collect three unhatched eggs from the colony. It was believed that emperor penguins could represent an evolutionary 'missing link' between reptiles and birds.
*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2003), **46**(1), 5.

### Improved tests help combat frog fungus

Frog populations worldwide have been threatened by the chytrid fungus that has been infecting animals since the 1940s. The fungus has helped to drive



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at least nine species to extinction and it threatens many more. It kills by either producing toxins or preventing frogs from breathing through their skins. Until now, the only evidence of the presence of the fungus was when animals started to sicken and die. Now a new test, developed at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, promises to spot infection before it is too late. Skin cells from frogs suspected of carrying the fungus are analysed for traces of the fungus' DNA. The test can detect minute traces of DNA and as well as helping fight infection in New Zealand, it may shed more light on the origin of the fungus. It has been suggested that the disease spread from South Africa on African clawed frogs who were infected with the fungus without becoming sick.
*Source: New Scientist* (2003), **177**(2382), 18.

**Pressure to create a Fiordland Marine Park**

Fiordland National Park in New Zealand is renowned for its spectacular scenery but the fiords themselves are currently not part of the National Park and the South West New Zealand Te Wahipounamu World Heritage Area. There is now an opportunity to convince the New Zealand government to create a Fiordland Marine Park. In late 2002 the Guardians of Fiordland Fisheries and Marine Environment called for submissions on their management proposals for the fiords. The Guardians proposals are partially supported by Forest and Bird but the organizations feels that they do not adequately represent the full range of habitats and marine biodioversity found in Fiordland. In particular the organization is pressing for the inclusion of Milford Sound and Preservation Inlet to Fiordland National Park and establishment of a Fiordland Marine Park.
*Source: Forest & Bird Conservation News* (2003), **129**, 2.

The *Briefly* section in this issue was written and compiled by Simon Mickleburgh and Martin Fisher, with additional contributions from Marina Cords and Aparajita Datta. Contributions from authoritative published sources (including web sites) are always welcome. Please send contributions to Martin Fisher, Fauna & Flora International, Great Eastern House, Tenison Road, Cambridge, CB1 2TT, UK, or by e-mail to oryx@fauna-flora.org



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