

International

Eel populations threatened by harvest and trade in Europe and Asia

A recent detailed review has highlighted threats to eel populations. Populations of some species in the genus *Anguilla* have declined dramatically in the last 20 years. While changes in ocean currents affecting migration patterns, loss of river habitat, pollution and the impact of invasive species and local fishing have all played roles in this decline, another factor might also have been international trade. At the end of the 1990s Japanese eels were in short supply and European eels were imported to satisfy demand in the Japanese market. This led to overfishing and poaching in Europe. Eels are an essential food supply for many predators, and the eel trade is an important source of income for many people. Eels are particularly vulnerable due to their long and complex life cycle, about which little is known.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2002), 19(2), 81–106 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/bulletin/Nov2002/index.html>).

CITES regulates timber and fisheries trade

At the CITES meeting in Santiago, Chile in November 2002, important decisions were made concerning the timber and fisheries trades (see also pp. 136–137, this issue). A proposal was adopted to introduce strong trade controls for big-leafed mahogany, a highly valuable timber species. The Appendix II listing is a major step towards sustainable management of this tree species. Amongst other decisions, the conference also agreed to introduce controls on fisheries for sharks and Patagonian toothfish. In the latter case, this is the first time that CITES has committed to action on a large-scale commercially exploited marine fish. CITES will assist the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resource to eliminate illegal fishing for toothfish.

Source: <http://www.traffic.org/news/press-releases/timfish.html>

What are minimum viable population sizes for primates?

While there are theoretical estimates of the minimum viable population (MVP) sizes for mammals, there are little data to test these estimates. A recent study has used information on distribution of primates on islands in South-east Asia to provide estimates of MVPs following the post-Pleistocene insularization in the Sunda region. Results for 8–10 genera on 35 islands indicate MVPs of perhaps a few score for *Nycticebus* (loris) and *Macaca* (macaque) to several thousand, or scores of thousands, for *Pongo* (orang-utan) and *Symphalangus* (siamang). Only four protected areas in South-east Asia are large enough to conserve the smaller MVPs for the Siamang and orang-utan.

Source: *Animal Conservation* (2002), 5, 237–244.

New DNA test for sharks

Researchers have developed a new test that can determine which species are being used for shark-fin soup. This will allow regulators to determine whether fins are coming from legally-fished or protected species. Researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Society working with Nova South-eastern University have developed a reliable genetic test that will identify shark species from their fins alone. The test was used to identify six shark species that are commonly caught in North Atlantic waters: blue, dusky, porbeagle, silky and longfin and shortfin makos. These are sought after for their fins and are frequently caught as bycatch in tuna and swordfish fisheries. Researchers sampled 33 closely related shark species and were able to identify the six target species with almost 100% accuracy. The test can also be used on dried fins. Eventually it is hoped the test will identify 35 species of commercially exploited shark.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(10), 981.

Revising the conservation status of cats

The conservation status of members of the cat family has been revised for the new 2002 IUCN Red List (see <http://www.redlist.org>).

The Iberian lynx is now categorized as Critically Endangered and the Andean mountain cat, Borneo bay cat, snow leopard and tiger as Endangered. A further 12 species are categorized as Vulnerable, eight species as Near Threatened and 11 as Least Concern. Thus almost 50% of cats are in the three most threatened categories, compared to only 14% for canids and 28% for all carnivores. Of the 16 changes in status since the last Red List, most have been downgradings to a lower threat category. The Iberian lynx has been upgraded from Endangered to Critically Endangered, while the status of three species, Chinese mountain cat, marbled cat and rusty-spotted cat has changed from Data Deficient to Vulnerable.

Source: *Cat News* (2002), 37, 4–6.

Global Amphibian Assessment making rapid progress

The Conservation International/Center for Applied Biodiversity – IUCN/Species Survival Commission Biodiversity Assessment Unit is coordinating the Global Amphibian Assessment. To date data have been received for about 5,200 of the world's 5,500 known amphibian species. Preliminary evidence suggests that nearly half of the species in the Caribbean islands are Critically Endangered and Endangered. High levels of threat have also been recorded for Africa, tropical Asia, China and Central America. The assessment is intended to be the start of an ongoing process to implement long-term monitoring of amphibians worldwide.

Source: *Froglog* (2002), 54, 2.

Swordfish are recovering in the North Atlantic

Populations of swordfish in the North Atlantic are showing a remarkable recovery, according to the Wildlife Conservation Society, who began working to protect these species in 1999. The Society have recommended that catches of swordfish need to be reduced to a 10,000 tonne quota to give populations a chance to recover. Some areas were closed to fishing to allow populations to rebuild more quickly. A recent evaluation

showed that the North Atlantic swordfish population is currently at 94% of the level at which maximum sustainable yield can be produced on a long-term basis. At this rate, the population may recover by 2009 or sooner. The status of swordfish populations in the South Atlantic and Pacific are unknown.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(12), 1318.

Readmission of Iceland to whaling commission causes storm

Australia has led protests about the re-admission of Iceland to the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Iceland withdrew from the IWC in 1992 and is rejoining whilst entering a reservation excluding itself from the moratorium on commercial whaling, and has also threatened to restart commercial whaling in 2006. The IWC has allowed Iceland to be readmitted despite the fact that they will not abide by the moratorium and that they will be able to vote as part of the pro-whaling bloc, making the task of conservation-minded nations all the more difficult.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(12), 1318.

Updated IUCN Red List released

On 8 October 2002 IUCN and the Species Survival Commission released an updated *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*. This is the first of what will be annual updates of the Red List database (see <http://www.redlist.org>). Since the last edition in September 2000 over 400 new species assessments have been added, 124 of them entering one of the threatened categories: Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable. There are now 11,167 species threatened with extinction, an increase of 121 since 2000. There are now 5,714 threatened plant species, an increase of 103 since 2000. However only approximately 4% of the world's described species have been evaluated, and so the real percentage of threatened plants is much higher.

Source: *Species* (2002), 38, 6–7

(also available at <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/species/species38.pdf>).

Up to half the world's plants may be threatened

A new study suggests that as many as half of the world's plant species may qualify as threatened with extinction based on the IUCN threat categories.

Comprehensive Red Lists are not available for most tropical countries, and therefore researchers approximated the missing data by counting the number of endemic plant species and using this as a "reasonable proxy" for the number of threatened species. Endemic species represent 46–62% of the world's plants, but this is thought to be an overestimate of the number of threatened species because the proportion of threatened species in temperate countries is often much less than the proportion of endemic species. Endemic plants in biodiversity hotspots are more likely to qualify as threatened than those elsewhere, as are those endemic to small countries.

Source: *Science* (2002), 298, 989.

Conservation money is being wasted in rich, developed countries

A recent study has revealed the great discrepancy between the costs of conservation in different parts of the world. Looking at the management costs of 139 field-based projects in every continent except Antarctica, the study showed that more than 88% of the US \$6 billion paid out annually on habitat conservation is spent in the developed world, and the authors suggest the money could be better spent elsewhere. The cost of conservation per km² varied from just 7 US cents in the Lena delta nature reserve in the Russian arctic to US \$1.37 million to restore the Benninger marsh in Germany. Not surprisingly, the study suggests better value for money can be obtained in poorer countries but also that there should be more investment in wilderness areas such as those of Namibia and Mongolia that are very cheap to work in.

Source: *New Scientist* (2003), 177 (2379), 5.

Assessing the possible risks from GM trees

Genetically modified trees, unlike their crop equivalents, have not raised concerns about possible environmental impacts. However, for the first time, geneticists are evaluating possible risks from GM trees. GM trees are being developed, although none are currently grown on a commercial scale. A new study suggests that GM trees would only rarely cross-breed with wild relatives and then only with nearby trees. However, the study's authors stress that GM trees do have the potential to spread pollen over a large area. Tree pollen can travel up to 16 km,

eight times as far as pollen from oilseed rape, the most promiscuous GM crop. The scientists are now trying to predict possible environmental impacts of GM poplar trees over the time period of decades, and believe that only GM traits that confer some fitness advantage, such as pest resistance, will have significant impacts. However, they suggest that growers create sterile trees that cannot cross-pollinate.

Source: *New Scientist* (2003), 177 (2379), 8.

North-west Atlantic sharks facing extinction

The scale of the threat to sharks from overexploitation is largely unknown. However, a recent study of populations in the North-west Atlantic indicates that there have been rapid declines in large populations of coastal and oceanic sharks. Using the largest data set in the North-west Atlantic, based on the number of sharks caught by fishing vessels, it has been estimated that scalloped hammerhead, white and thresher sharks have declined by over 75% in the past 15 years. Sharks are caught intentionally for sport as well as accidentally in fishing operations designed for tuna and swordfish. The study highlights priority areas for shark conservation and the need to consider reallocation of effort and site selection if marine reserves are to benefit multiple threatened species.

Source: *New Scientist* (2003), 177(2379), 24.

Europe

Zoos do not meet needs of elephants

An RSPCA report on the welfare of elephants in zoos paints a grim picture of their existence. Adult elephants in European zoos have about half the 30-year lifespan of their counterparts working in Asian timber camps, while zoo breeding programmes have a poor record (see also *Oryx* 37(1), 20–25, 2003). The RSPCA concludes that elephants must be phased out of zoos, with an immediate end to breeding and importation. For existing elephants substantial and monitored welfare improvements must become a priority.

Source: *Live Hard, Die Young – How Elephants Suffer in Zoos* is available at <http://www.rspca.org.uk>

EU policy undermines sustainability of fishing

A recent report by WWF, *Baby Fish*, shows that many EU fishing boats catch large numbers of small and immature fish, seriously undermining chances of making fishing sustainable. Almost 100,000 fishing vessels within the EU catch 6–7 million tonnes of fish each year and some stocks are on the verge of collapse. Large adult fish are getting fewer, and smaller immature fish are providing a substitute. Although immature fish are sometimes consumed, in most cases they are discarded. WWF is calling on the EU to ensure its new Common Fisheries Policy strengthens limits on the size of fish that can be caught and adopts regulations on selective fishing methods.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(10), 979.

Continued threat to dolphins in Europe

Despite limits, and in some cases bans, on driftnet fishing, this activity continues to cause havoc in European waters. According to WWF, enforcement of rules on driftnet fishing have been lax. Driftnets have been responsible for the deaths of dolphins and other marine species. In 2002 a complete ban on driftnet fishing was rejected by Italian fishermen who still use about 90 boats equipped with driftnets. French fishermen have tried unsuccessfully to get exemptions from the ban. Even with full enforcement, there is a problem with non-EU countries who still use such technology. Morocco has about 400 driftnet boats operating in the Mediterranean and some driftnet fleets in North African countries, Turkey, Albania and Malta are expanding as those in Europe are declining.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(12), 1317–1318.

Norway's poor record in carnivore conservation

Conservationists have continued to highlight Norway's poor track record in managing its carnivore populations. The wolverine is rare in Europe and there are thought to be about 230 in Norway, but since October 2000 at least 85 wolverines have been slaughtered. A tiny isolated population of 50 occurs in

the south-west but even there at least 14 animals have been killed. In February 2001 there were thought to be 28 grey wolves in the whole of Norway but by the end of March 2001 a 40-strong hunting team had killed nine of them. Finally, Norway has between 26 and 55 brown bears but culls them at an unsustainable rate of 10–20% per year.

Source: *Small Carnivore Conservation* (2002), 27, 16.

Concerns over illegal logging in Estonia

The Estonian Prime Minister, Siim Kallas, has admitted that the government has failed to show an appropriate response to illegal logging in the Lahemaa National Park. Illegal logging is widespread in Estonia, and illegal timber accounts for up to 40% of that exported. There is a proposal to form an inter-ministerial working group to propose amendments to the Forest Act and Forestry Development Plan. In a separate development, it has been claimed that the Imavere Sawmill, which has been issued with a Forest Stewardship Council Chain of Custody certification, has purchased timber that had been illegally logged from Lahemaa National Park. Imavere has confirmed that illegally felled timber was delivered to the sawmill but claimed that it would not buy or process it.

Source: *Taiga-news* (2002), 41, 3 (also available at <http://www.taigaescue.org/taiganews>).

Danish NGO told it cannot 'blacklist' furniture suppliers

The Danish NGO Nepenthes has been told by the Danish Data Protection Agency that it cannot advise consumers against purchasing from shops where they risk buying garden furniture whose production has contributed to rainforest destruction. This followed a complaint from the Danish Timber Trade Federation on behalf of a company on Nepenthes' blacklist. Nepenthes had used a system whereby companies that sold over 50% FSC certified furniture were on a 'whitelist', those selling 5–49% certified goods on a 'greylist' and those selling little or no certified goods on a blacklist.

Source: *Taiga-news* (2002), 41, 6 (also available at <http://www.taigaescue.org/taiganews>).

Butterflies moving uphill

New research demonstrates for the first time ever that British wildlife is reacting to global warming not simply by moving northwards as expected, but also by moving uphill – with potentially devastating consequences for the long-term survival of some species. Researchers from Butterfly Conservation, studying the effects of global warming on butterflies, have shown that as temperatures rise, butterfly species that prefer a cooler climate are being forced to seek habitat further north and at higher and higher altitudes. As temperatures rise further, northern species are predicted to decline dramatically as they disappear from the southern margins of their ranges, but have little opportunity to expand northwards. The outlook is bleak for upland species such as the Large Heath and Northern Brown Argus, already under threat from large-scale habitat destruction.

Source: *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* (2002), 269(1505), 2163–2171.

National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit launched in UK

In April 2002 the UK Environment Minister Michael Meacher formally launched the National Wildlife Crime Intelligence Unit. The Unit will act as a focal point for gathering, analysing and disseminating intelligence on serious wildlife crime on a regional, national and international level, and will also provide a nucleus of expertise and knowledge and will establish links with domestic and international agencies dealing with wildlife crime.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2002), 19(2), 53 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/bulletin/Nov2002/index.html>).

Cold-water corals at risk

The Darwin Mounds are cold-water corals that are unique to Scotland. Located some 1,000 m below the surface of the ocean, about 185 km north-west of Cape Wrath, the reefs are threatened by damage from deep-sea trawling. In 2001 the UK Secretary of State for the Environment promised to protect the mounds by declaring them a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) but there has still been no government action. Meanwhile information from WWF has revealed that catches of deep-water fish species doubled in the area in 2001.

WWF is calling on the government to immediately implement the SAC designation and to issue emergency measures to stop deep-water trawling in the area.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(12), 1317.

Urban rivers in UK are getting cleaner

New data from the UK's Environment Agency has shown that urban rivers are starting to catch up with their cleaner rural counterparts. The agency surveys 40,000 km of rivers and canals in England and Wales on an annual basis. The catch of salmon in the River Tyne in 2001 was the highest since 1927, and there have been signs of otters in urban catchments in the Midlands. Overall in 2001, 95% of rivers were found to be of good or fair chemical quality compared to 94% in 2000 and just under 85% in 1990. However, the figures show that 1 in 8 urban rivers are categorized as 'poor' or 'bad'.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(11), 1173.

Survey highlights trade in Lignum vitae in Germany

Guaiacum, also known as 'Lignum vitae', is a mostly neotropical tree genus used for medicinal and timber purposes. Between November 2001 and February 2002 a survey was carried out on behalf of the German CITES Scientific Authority to assess the effect of international trade on the Mexican endemic species *Guaiacum coulteri*. Overall demand for the species in Germany is between 50 and 90 tonnes a year. About 50 tonnes is imported for the timber market and up to 40 tonnes of resin and wood chips are used as an aromatic compound for the liqueur industry. At the 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES held in Santiago, Chile in November 2002, it was agreed to include all species of *Guaiacum* on Appendix II of the Convention.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2002), 19(2), 64 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/bulletin/Nov2002/index.html>).

Publishing giant receives environmental award

The German publishing giant Axel Springer Verlag and its partners won an award at the World Summit in Johannesburg for their programme to

create transparency in the paper chain from forest to publication. The programme includes the initiative called 'Newspapers that know their trees', which uses the internet to allow newspaper readers to pinpoint the region and the forest from which their newspaper originates.

Source: *Taiga-news* (2002), 41, 8 (also available at <http://www.taigarecue.org/taiganews>).

Iberian lynx is Critically Endangered

The publication of the 2002 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species has confirmed that the Iberian lynx is now listed as Critically Endangered. This is the first wild cat to be considered at such high risk of extinction. In the most recent survey only two reproducing, but separated populations – in the Coto Doñana and near Andújar – were identified, with a combined total of not more than 150 animals. Iberian lynx are threatened mainly by habitat fragmentation, industrial development and a decline in rabbits, their principal prey. A meeting to review the situation was held in October 2002 and this highlighted the actions that need to be taken to prevent the lynx's extinction.

Source: *Cat News* (2002), 37, 2–4.

North Africa and Middle East

Increased hunting of snow leopard

The International Snow Leopard Trust has highlighted the increasing threat to snow leopard populations from hunting in the western Himalayas of Afghanistan and Pakistan (see also *Oryx* 37(1), 26–33, 2003). The biggest problem is the influx of people with guns into the snow leopard's range. In northern Afghanistan, landmines have left large areas uninhabitable. Together with drought, this has forced locals to go further into the mountains. The sale of pelts in Kabul and Faizabad is becoming more common despite the fact that there is an international ban on trade in snow leopard products. The Trust has estimated that there are probably fewer than 100 snow leopards still in Afghanistan.

Source: <http://www.snowleopard.org/isl/news/afghan.htm>

Sub-Saharan Africa

Vaccination may save Ethiopian wolf

There are only about 500 Ethiopian wolves left in the wild, making it the world's most threatened canid (see *Oryx* 37(1), 62–71, 2003). Rabies is a serious threat to remaining wolves because animals frequently come into contact with rabid dogs. Researchers believe that they can save the wolf through vaccination. They predict that a population of wolves will survive if just a third of them living in a 75 km² patch are vaccinated. The team is now investigating the likely costs and whether wolves will take a vaccine-laced bait.

Source: *Conservation Biology* (2002), 16, 1372–1385.

Plans to privatize Lake Victoria

A recent newspaper report suggests that the Ugandan government has plans to privatize portions of Lake Victoria. Parts of the lake would be leased to provide economic opportunities including the leasing of islands to the rich and famous to build private holiday resorts and boost tourism. A big opportunity would be from water sports, where investors would be given limited jurisdiction near the shore provided they could keep it clear of litter and other inconveniences such as water hyacinth.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(10), 982

Status of carnivores on Bioko

The island of Bioko in the Gulf of Guinea, West Africa, has a limited mammalian fauna of 65 species. Only four species of carnivores have been recorded from the island: Central African large-spotted genet *Genetta maculata*, Central African linsang *Poiana richardsonii richardsonii*, African palm civet *Nandinia binotata binotata*, and swamp otter *Aonyx [Paraonyx] congica poensis*. Since 1990, field and market surveys have looked at a range of species including carnivores. Only one of the above four carnivores was recorded during these surveys. The linsang still exists in small numbers in remote areas of the island. The existence of the genet and palm civet are thought to be uncertain, while the swamp otter is thought to be extinct on Bioko.

Source: *Small Carnivore Conservation* (2002), 27, 19–22.

Beheaded turtles washed ashore in Mozambique

There are concerns at reports that illegal, unlicensed vessels are fishing in Mozambican waters using methods that have resulted in the deaths of an estimated 40 marine turtles since the beginning of 2003. The boats are said to be of Chinese, Korean or Taiwanese origin and are using longlines to catch sharks, possibly for the lucrative shark fin market. The longlines, that can be up to 25 km long, are baited with hooks that can catch and drown marine turtles, particularly leatherback and loggerhead turtles. The illegal longlining fishery is adding to heavy pressures on Mozambique's turtle populations. Each year shallow-water shrimp trawlers operating in Sofala Bank in central Mozambican waters kill between 1,900 and 5,400 marine turtles caught as bycatch.

Source: http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=5561

South African blue swallows threatened with extinction

The South African blue swallow may become extinct unless serious habitat management issues are addressed. There are only about 80 documented active nests in South Africa. The swallows migrate from East Africa in the summer to breed in mountain grassland habitats. However, the local timber industry favours these habitats, which are ideal for pine plantations. A project is being undertaken by Earthwatch that aims to contribute to an environmental management plan for the species as well as raising public awareness of blue swallows and their grassland habitat.

Source: <http://www.earthwatch.org/expeditions/dzerefos.html>

South China tigers will be trained in South Africa prior to reintroduction

The conservation organization Save China's Tigers has secured an agreement with the Wildlife Research Centre of the State Forestry Administration of China and the Chinese Tigers South Africa Trust of South Africa over the reintroduction of South China tigers into the wild. Selected tiger cubs from zoos will be sent to South Africa where they will be trained to hunt effectively in an area of 300 km². Tigers that have successfully regained hunting skills will be returned

to a pilot reserve in China. The first rehabilitated tigers are expected to be reintroduced into the wild in China in 2008.

Source: *Cat News* (2002), 37, 11.

Zambia receives wetland award

WWF has awarded Zambia a Wetlands Certificate of International Importance in recognition of its outstanding contribution to conservation and wise use of wetlands. This places the Zambia wetlands project fourth in the world behind Chad, Guinea and Peru.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(10), 982.

Bleak future for Malagasy giant jumping rat

The Malagasy giant jumping rat *Hypogeomys antimena* is the largest extant rodent in Madagascar. It is restricted to primary dry deciduous forest along the western coast of Madagascar and can be considered a key species of this biome owing to its behavioural inflexibility and avoidance of secondary forest formations. The main threat to the species is habitat loss. A Population and Habitat Viability Analysis was recently carried out, and this predicted an ongoing decline over the next 100 years even if further habitat decline can be halted within 5 years. If the present annual rate of habitat loss continues, the extinction of the two sub-populations and therefore the entire species is predicted within 24 years.

Source: *Animal Conservation* (2002), 5, 263–273.

South and South-east Asia

Jammu and Kashmir bans shahtoosh manufacture

On 6 May 2002 the Government of the State of Jammu and Kashmir in India made an historic move to ban the manufacture of shahtoosh shawls made from wool of the endangered Tibetan antelope or chiru *Pantholops hodgsonii*. In August 2002 information collected by TRAFFIC in Jammu and in Leh, Ladakh, showed an overall decline in the manufacture and trade in shahtoosh shawls in recent years. However, there is evidence of a continuing illegal trade in shahtoosh

wool across the Indo-Tibetan border and clandestine manufacture of shawls in Srinagar.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2002), 19(2), 53 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/bulletin/Nov2002/index.html>).

Important amendment to India's wildlife legislation

The Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act contains numerous errors of archaic language that has had serious consequences for conservation of wildlife. One of the most obvious has been the definition of the word 'animal'. The Wildlife Protection Act defined 'animals' as amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles (including the young and eggs of birds and reptiles). This therefore excludes fishes and invertebrates and means that issues regarding protection of these species can be legally challenged. After much lobbying a change has been made. The Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill 2002 redefines 'animal' as including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, other chordates and invertebrates, and also includes their eggs and young.

Source: *Zoos' Print* (2003), 18(1), 1.

Vietnam reefs are richer than previously thought

Surveys by WWF in south Vietnam have shown that coral reefs are much more diverse than was originally thought. In Con Dao more than 100 new species have been found including 11 not previously recorded in Vietnam. A brief survey of coral reefs near Nui Chuan Nature Reserve identified 197 reef-building species, 14 of them new to Vietnam. Both of these areas are important reservoirs of regional biodiversity.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(11), 1176.

Sea turtle conservation in Cambodia

In September 2002 a workshop was held in Cambodia focusing on sea turtle research, biology and conservation. It was attended by over 40 delegates from government departments and NGOs in Cambodia and others from Vietnam and Thailand. This is seen as a first step in efforts to conserve marine turtles in Cambodia. One of the key early activities will be the development of the first components of a National Action Plan. Local scientists have been prepared for beach

monitoring and data collection activities, and others have been made aware of the biological constraints within which marine turtle conservation may be achieved. Through continued support from international funding agencies it is hoped that long-term legislative and physical protection and conservation of marine turtles in Cambodia can be achieved.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2002), 98, 18 (also available at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn>).

New species of wolf snake from the Cardamom Mountains, Cambodia

Unlike some other countries in the region, the herpetofauna of Cambodia is poorly known. The Cardamom Mountains in the south-west are the most remote and least known part of the country. During a survey in 2000 a specimen of a wolf snake (*Lycodon*) was collected that is now thought to be a new species, *Lycodon cardamomensis*. Only one specimen of the Cardamom wolf snake currently exists and although the area where it was collected, Phnom Sankos Wildlife Sanctuary, is nominally a protected area, it has no management plan and is the target of international aid agencies for human settlement. Outside the protected area, forest has been parcelled into areas for commercial logging concessions. The future of the habitat for this species is far from secure.

Source: *Herpetologica* (2002), 58(4), 498–504.

Massacre of tigers in Malaysia is averted

In May and July 2002 three rubber tappers were killed by tigers in Jeli District of Kelantan in Malaysia. As a result, Kelantan's Chief Minister had called for the mass slaughter of tigers. Thankfully, the Federal Ministry for Science, Technology and Environment has declared such action illegal and the Chief Minister has agreed to an offer by WWF Malaysia to help minimize conflict between tigers and humans.

Source: *Cat News* (2002), 37, 14.

New population of orang-utans in Borneo

Orang-utans are found only on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra and are threatened by uncontrolled logging, illegal poaching and environmental degradation. A survey team funded by

The Nature Conservancy has recently discovered a large population of orang-utans that was not previously known to exist. In all, 1,600 nests were counted, giving an estimate of at least 1,000 orang-utans residing in a 140,000 ha area of East Kalimantan on the island of Borneo. This population could correspond to up to 10% of the world's estimated remaining orang-utan population. This could be one of the three largest populations of this species in the world.

Source: <http://nature.org/magazine/winter2002/orangutans>

Philippines ecosystems degraded by illegal fishing

The Philippines Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources has reported that the marine ecosystem is degrading due to illegal fishing practices. As a result more fish sanctuaries and marine reserve projects are being established. The banning of fishing on preserved areas was given more teeth when local legislators passed their own ordinance to protect their marine resources. For example, the municipality of San Isidro declared some local areas as fish sanctuaries, with penalty provisions for violators of the fishing laws.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(10), 982.

East Asia

Medicinal plant imports into Taiwan continue to increase

In July 2002 TRAFFIC East Asia-Taipei published a report *Current Survey of Chinese Medicine in Taiwan and the Import of Medicinal Plants*. The report highlighted that Taiwan was number five in the list of top importers of medicinal plants. Among plants imported into Taiwan are species gathered from the wild in South-east Asia and mainland China. According to the report Taiwan uses 600 types of Chinese medicinal ingredients of which 79% are plants. Some of the species used are on the CITES Appendices, though in most cases the plants are from cultivated stock. However, *Dendrobium* species are particularly at risk. Most of the wild stocks of this species have disappeared from Taiwan and much now comes from wild populations in China. The report

suggests tighter controls on the import of vulnerable species and large-scale cultivation where possible.

Source: *International Conservation Newsletter* (2002), 10–3(3), 3–4.

Are South China tigers extinct?

A 10-month survey has failed to confirm if the South China tiger is extinct in the wild. The Chinese State Forestry Administration that organized the survey believes that there are small populations of tigers in four isolated habitats. The survey provided no sightings of tigers, but the presence of faeces, hairs, footprints and remains of kills was felt to be confirmation of their presence. However, a leading American tiger specialist, Ron Tilson, who led the survey believes that, although there may be a few remaining individuals, they do not constitute a viable population.

Source: *Cat News* (2002), 37, 9–10.

North America

Transgenic salmon still off the menu in the US

Approval for the commercial farming of transgenic salmon in the US is still 18 months away according to the only company, Aqua Bounty Farms, that has filed for approval to use them. Opponents of the use of transgenic fish point to unknown risks posed by the possible escape of fish from their farms, possible competition for food with wild fish, the introduction of transgenes into wild fish, and even possible collapse of wild fish populations. Aqua Bounty's Atlantic salmon carry a gene from the Pacific chinook salmon that allows them to grow twice as fast as most farmed salmon whilst consuming less food. Other countries are working on producing transgenic fish: China has been working with carp since the 1980s and Cuba with tilapia since 1993.

Source: *Nature* (2003), 421, 304.

Biodiversity survey of Great Lakes is launched

The US Geological Survey is launching a 5-year study in the Great Lakes basin to identify and map unprotected areas that show substantial richness in aquatic animal species. It is estimated that the Great Lakes region has more than 30

biological communities that are found nowhere else. There are many threats to the biodiversity of the area, including invasive species, agricultural development, forestry and urban expansion. *Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(11), 1175.

Audubon list of America's most threatened birds

The National Audubon Society in the US has released a report *WatchList 2002* that identifies 201 species of birds that show either significantly decreasing numbers or restricted range or are under other threats. The list reveals some disturbing trends. For example, many songbird species have declined by as much as 50% or more since 1970. The *WatchList* is a project that filters information on bird populations compiled by field scientists in the US and overseas. It places birds in green, yellow or red categories depending on the danger they face. It aims to halt the declines in America's birds and rebuild their populations to a healthy status.

Source: 'Elepaio (2002), 62(8), 161 (also available at <http://www.hawaii.audubon.com/newsletter.html>).

Threat to Mojave Desert evaporates

In October 2002 the board of the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) of Southern California voted to scrap a US \$150 million project proposed by Cadiz Inc. that would have mined groundwater from an aquifer beneath Cadiz's land in the Mojave Desert to sell at a profit to southern Californians. Critics of the project had argued that the activity would have seriously lowered the area's water table, causing water shortages and dust storms that would be harmful to wildlife such as the desert bighorn sheep and desert tortoise. The project had been given the green light by the Department of the Interior in September 2002 but the MWD decided to vote on the plan in October, much sooner than expected.

Source: National Parks (2002), 76(9–10), 9.

Island foxes may receive protection

Four subspecies of the tiny island fox *Urocyon littoralis* that inhabit four of

the Channel Islands off the southern Californian coast may receive protection under the US Endangered Species Act. Fox populations on the islands of Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel and Santa Catalina have fallen dramatically since 1995. There are no wild populations left on San Miguel and Santa Rosa, and numbers on Santa Cruz and Santa Catalina are thought to be fewer than 100 and 200, respectively. The primary causes of decline are predation by golden eagles, the rapid spread of canine distemper through the Santa Catalina island subspecies, and habitat degradation caused by the introduction of sheep, goats, rabbits, deer, elk, cattle, pigs and horses.

Source: Endangered Species Bulletin (2002), 27(3), 29.

Critical habitat designated on O'ahu

On 10 December 2001, 26,660 ha of critical habitat was designated on the island of O'ahu in the Hawaiian Islands. This was to help conserve the O'ahu 'elepaio *Chasiempis sandwichensis ibidis* a forest bird that was once considered to be the most common native land bird on the island. Today an estimated 1,982 individuals exist in scattered locations, with their current range less than 4% of the original. The five critical habitat units include almost all of the currently occupied land and enough unoccupied historical habitat to support a self-sustaining population.

Source: Endangered Species Bulletin (2002), 27(3), 31 (also available at <http://endangered.fws.gov/esb/2002/07-08/toc.html>).

How climate change may affect Hawaiian honeycreepers

Hawaiian honeycreepers are birds that are famed as an example of adaptive radiation similar to that amongst the finches of the Galapagos Islands. They are now threatened by forest loss due to the expansion of crop and pasture land and the impact of human-introduced predators and diseases, and 19 species are considered Critically Endangered. A new study has modelled the possible impact of climate change on these threatened species and has concluded that climate change impacts on high-elevation forest refuges on three islands

are likely to combine with other threats to drive several of the remaining species to extinction, particularly on the islands of Hawaii and Kauai.

Source: Proceedings of the US National Academy of Sciences (2002), 99, 14246–14249.

Poaching threatens Chihuahuan desert cacti

Demand for wild cacti and rare plants by landscapers and plant collectors may soon surpass supply in the Chihuahuan Desert of Mexico and the United States, according to a new study by TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network and joint programme of WWF and IUCN. The study found that unsustainable trade could endanger certain populations of cacti if measures are not taken to regulate their harvesting. The Chihuahuan Desert is home to almost a quarter of the 1,500 cactus species known to science, and the booming desert landscaping trend, combined with poor regulation of legal plant harvesting, is putting pressure on many species. Use of cacti for low-water landscaping and demand for rare and newly discovered specimens by 'cactophiles' is resulting in the heavy and illegal harvest of desirable species. Many consumers and tourists are unaware they may be breaking the law when they collect, purchase or export cacti from countries that restrict these activities. According to the report, Mexican authorities seized nearly 800 cactus specimens from travellers entering or passing through the US from Mexico in 1998. The report *Prickly Trade: Trade and Conservation of Chihuahuan Desert Cacti* recommends better monitoring of the cactus trade, strengthening protection for the species that are under the most pressure from exploitation, and developing community-based programs to harvest common species and commercially cultivate slow-growing species. *Source: http://www.traffic.org/news/press-releases/prickly_trade.html*

Mexican sea turtle nests at all-time high

More than 6,200 Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests have been laid at or near Rancho Nuevo, the sole Mexican nesting beach for this species. In addition, 37 more turtles have nested at Padre Island National Seashore and other areas in Texas. This record number of nests

vindicates efforts made over a 40-year period by US and Mexican wildlife agents that have included a complex headstarting, or transplanting, of Mexican turtle eggs to the Padre Island National Seashore.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2002), 98, 29 (also available at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn>).

Central America and Caribbean

First ever scientific jaguar census

Scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society have undertaken the first scientific jaguar census in the Coxcomb Jaguar Reserve in Belize. They estimated that 14 jaguars live in a 142 km² area of dense rainforest. The method used was developed for estimating tiger densities in India. Individual jaguars were identified by their unique spot pattern using camera traps, and densities were calculated from the number of times each cat was photographed. The density of jaguars in the reserve was comparable to some of the most productive tiger habitats in India. The method can be used for any cat that has a unique stripe or spot pattern.

Source: *Cat News* (2002), 37, 17.

Costa Rican president pledges to protect coastal ecosystems

On 8 May 2002 the newly elected president of Costa Rica, Dr Abel Pacheco de la Espriella pledged that his country would oppose offshore oil-drilling and promote environmental protection along the biologically diverse coastal ecosystems of the Caribbean region of the country. The Costa Rican government rejected an appeal by a US consortium that were promoting petroleum exploration in the area.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2002), 98, 28 (also available at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn>).

Priority bird conservation areas in El Salvador

A recent review has aimed to identify key areas that would help conserve the bird biodiversity of El Salvador. The

country has the smallest protected areas system in Central America, and high levels of habitat destruction and disturbance make the reserve approach important for the conservation of biodiversity. Montecritso National Park was the most important area with 42% of nationally threatened birds present. Three other areas were also considered important: El Imposible National Park, Laguna El Jocotal wildlife refuge and Barra de Santiago wildlife refuge. These four areas provide refuge for 83% of El Salvador's 268 nationally threatened bird species in less than 7,600 ha of natural habitat.

Source: *Animal Conservation* (2002), 5, 173–183.

Cayman Island iguanas threatened with extinction

In June 2002 the Iguana Recovery Program of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands estimated that there were only 10–25 Cayman Island blue iguanas left in the wild, down from about 100–200 in 1993. Scientists sponsored by the International Iguana Foundation are discussing the possibility of collecting the last remaining iguanas from the wild to attempt a recovery programme. The greatest threats to iguanas are habitat loss and killing by feral cats, domestic dogs and road traffic.

Source: *International Zoo News* (2002), 49(7), 424. (also at <http://www.zoonews.ws/IZN/index.htm>)

South America

Fishery activities and trade of Patagonian toothfish in South America

A new study *Fishery Activities and Trade of Patagonian Toothfish in South America: A Regional Perspective* reveals that a lack of coordination of fishing activities between South American countries targeting highly valuable Patagonian Toothfish could be contributing to the severe pressure that the species faces globally from unregulated fishing. TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, calls for urgent dialogue between South American countries with commercial interests in Patagonian Toothfish to develop much needed joint management

measures to achieve mutual conservation and sustainable use goals for the fishery and trade of the species. The study analyses information for each of the five countries in the region engaged in the catch and/or trade of toothfish: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Uruguay.

Source: <http://www.traffic.org/news/press-releases/toothfish1.pdf> (in Spanish); see http://www.traffic.org/news/press-releases/tsam_eng_summary.pdf for country summaries in English.

Spix's macaw – latest developments

Spix's macaw was declared extinct in the wild in December 2000. There are about 60 of these parrots currently held in captivity. With reintroduction now the only answer to the bird's long-term survival, the field programme has ensured the creation of conditions that will make success more likely. The Permanent Committee for the Recovery of Spix's Macaw was established in 1990 to oversee conservation activities. The Committee has now run its course and in September 2002 it was agreed that the ownership of all Spix's macaws should be returned to the Brazilian government. On 24th September 2002 a female from Loro Parque was returned to Brazil to be paired with a carefully selected mate to improve the breeding programme there.

Source: *International Zoo News* (2002), 49(7), 423–424. (also at <http://www.zoonews.ws/IZN/index.htm>)

Pacific

Two Guam birds now believed extinct

On 25 January 2002 it was proposed that two birds native to the island of Guam in the western Pacific be removed from the list of threatened and endangered species in the US. The Mariana mallard *Anas platyrhynchos oustaleti* and the Guam broadbill *Myiagra freycineti* are both believed to be extinct. The Mariana mallard was known only from the islands of Guam, Tinian and Saipan, and was probably never abundant due to limited habitat availability. The last confirmed

sighting was in 1979. The Guam broadbill was also probably never abundant. It was endemic to Guam, and severely affected by predation of the non-native brown tree snake *Boiga irregularis*. It was last seen in 1984.

Source: *Endangered Species Bulletin* (2002), 27(3), 30 (also available at <http://endangered.fws.gov/esb/2002/07-08/toc.html>).

Critical habitat proposed for Guam and Rota

In October 2002 the US Fish and Wildlife Service released a proposal for the designation of critical habitat on the islands of Guam and Rota in order to protect the Mariana fruit bat, Mariana crow and Micronesian kingfisher. The proposed units include native limestone forest in northern and southern Guam to protect all three species and one unit on Rota for the Mariana crow. The area of the proposed habitat comprises approximately 10,000 ha on Guam and almost 2,500 ha on Rota. A final critical habitat designation for the three species will be published by June 2003.

Source: *'Elepaio* (2002), 62(8), 164 (also available at <http://www.hawaiiadubon.com/newsletter.html>).

Australia/Antarctica/ New Zealand

Australia declares huge marine reserve

In October 2002 the Australian government declared that 6.5 million ha of Antarctic waters would become a new Marine Reserve. The area encompasses Heard Island and the McDonald Islands Marine Reserve and is the largest area in the world to be protected from commercial harvesting. The new Marine Reserve is twice the size of Switzerland and is located 4,500 km south-west of the Australian mainland and 1,000 km north of Antarctica. The McDonald Islands are the only sub-Antarctic island group that have no human-introduced animals. The reserve will protect southern elephant seal, sub-Antarctic fur seal, rare

seabirds and slow-growing plants species such as glass sponges.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2002), 44(11), 1173–1174.

Land clearing is decimating Australia's wildlife

A new report by WWF-Australia, *Impacts of Land Clearing on Australian Wildlife in Queensland*, shows that at least 100 million native mammals, birds and reptiles die each year as a result of broad-scale clearing of remnant vegetation in Queensland. On average 446,000 ha of remnant vegetation are cleared each year, leading to the loss of 190 million trees. The toll on native wildlife includes 2.1 million mammals, 8.5 million birds and 89 million reptiles. A major area of loss is in the brigalow belt where more than 52 million reptiles and 5 million birds are killed each year. These estimates are considered conservative and only based upon species for which abundance has been measured in the habitats subject to land clearing – for example, there are no estimates of the number of bats killed by land clearing.

Source: http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=5490

Tackling impact of vehicles on wildlife in New Zealand

The New Zealand Department of Conservation and regional and district councils are finally tackling the issue of the impact of vehicles on beaches. In the Auckland Region a group has been set up to discuss how beaches can be managed more sustainably, although with an emphasis on vehicle use. In the Bay of Plenty region consideration is being given to closing areas to vehicles, and the Hawkes Bay Regional Council has made a decision to exclude vehicles from the wetland area between the mouths of the Tukituki and Ngaruroro Rivers in an attempt to protect colonies of seabirds that nest in the area.

Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation News* (2002), 128, 2.

Marine Reserves Bill nearing completion in New Zealand

A new Marine Reserves Bill may soon be introduced in New Zealand. The proposed bill will soon be open to public

submissions. Amongst other things the Bill would allow the creation of marine reserves out to the 200 nautical mile limit of the Exclusive Economic Zone – the limit is currently 12 nautical miles. Also there would be clear bans on fishing within marine reserves and provisions to control discharges into marine reserves. Controversially, the current version would allow mining in marine reserves, and conservation organizations are urging strong opposition to this and some other aspects of the bill when it comes up for public scrutiny.

Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation News* (2002), 128, 4.

Moas were less damaging for plants than introduced species

It has been argued that deer, sheep, cattle and goats are suitable replacements for the extinct moa in the management of native vegetation in New Zealand. However, experiments using emus and ostriches have shown that many trees and shrubs have special features that cope with the way such birds feed but that are a poor defence against introduced species. Moas were voracious plant feeders – the 100 kg birds ate about 10 kg of plant material each day. Using the moa's close relatives, ostriches and emus, it has been shown that plants with a particular architecture (i.e. small leaves, narrow strong or flexible stems and elastic branching patterns) could resist browsing by these birds. However, such architecture is useless protection against mammals and thus these animals are no substitute for moas.

Source: *Forest & Bird* (2002), 306, 6.

The *Briefly* section in this issue was written and compiled by Simon Mickleburgh and Martin Fisher, with additional contributions by Jenny Daltry and Anthony Rylands. 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