# Conservation news

## WikiEVA: the Red List of Venezuelan Fauna goes public

The product of a team of 81 scientists, 11 photographers and 20 artists, who examined the status of nearly 4,000 species, the 2008 Red List of Venezuelan Fauna includes 748 taxa, 198 of which are threatened, two regionally extinct and two extinct. It is based on the 2008 third edition of the Red Book of Venezuelan Fauna, published for the first time in 1995, re-edited in 1999 and reprinted in 2003. To compile the information for the fourth edition, and with the support of Shell Venezuela, Provita has launched an experiment by opening the consultation to the public, and inviting anyone interested to comment on the 2008 text.

Taking advantage of the MediaWiki platform (http://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki), WikiEVA (whose last three letters stand for *Especies Venezolanas Amenazadas*, Threatened Species of Venezuela) aims to increase the participation of the public in accessing and contributing information on the nation's biodiversity (http://wikieva.org.ve). Although WikiEVA will initially focus on animals, expansion to plants is already in development.

Because it is online and real-time, WikiEVA offers a mechanism for keeping the information on Venezuelan species current. Rather than having to coordinate large-scale updates of the database every 4–5 years, and then publish the next edition of the Red List, publication will now follow the simpler process of curating the data in the wiki and packaging them as the species accounts that characterize Red Lists. A team of three general editors and 18 editors by taxonomic group oversee the process, invite additional collaborators and verify the assessments.

The WikiEVA database currently holds templates for 2,828 species in 14 Classes. Information taken from the third edition of the Fauna Red Book (http://wikieva.org.ve/documentos/LRFV.pdf) was used to create draft species accounts for those 202 that are either threatened or extinct, and the templates for the other 2,626 are available for data entry. The team of editors has begun updating existing species accounts and compiling data for new ones but everyone is invited to become a contributor.

Editing WikiEVA species accounts is very simple: all that is required is to sign up. Creating a user and obtaining a password from the site are the only steps needed to change or update text. Contributors may report sightings, document threats, propose conservation actions, and upload photographs and images. All of the content of each species account is available for editing, comment or discussion.

Although WikiEVA is designed for a wide range of potential users interested in the conservation of Venezuelan biodiversity, a primary goal is to promote it among school-children and their teachers, as well as among university students and their professors. Experience with the fauna red books has shown that these are key audiences and keen user groups who do not have ready access to updated information on the country's biodiversity. We now aim to encourage them to contribute their experience and knowledge as well as to use the information.

Previously, major efforts were made to distribute red books through, for example, the national network of public libraries, but electronic distribution will be more efficient and cost effective, taking advantage of increasing access to the Internet in educational and academic institutions. Additional benefits include reduction in the use of paper for printing, and saving the costs of transporting books.

Ultimately, the success of WikiEVA will be best expressed by its impact on the conservation of Venezuelan threatened species. National and local governments will be able to use WikiEVA to inform environmental policies but may also use it to report on any action they take on behalf of threatened species in their jurisdiction. The publication of the fourth edition of the Red Book of Venezuelan Fauna is planned for 2013, and the book will be freely available online and will not be printed on paper.

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## India to establish a national database of camera-trapped tigers

Following the adoption of refined protocols for intensive annual monitoring of source populations of tiger (see *Oryx*, 46(4), 480), India's National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) is now following through by establishing a country-wide database of wild tigers captured in camera-trap surveys conducted by multiple research and governmental institutions at increasing intensity across the country. The objective of this project is to assign Unique Tiger Identification (UTID) numbers to a large sample of tigers.

A major objective of the project is avoiding multiple counting of individual tigers in multiple areas, a problem that dogged the now defunct pug-mark tiger census method, which was finally abandoned in 2006 in favour of camera-trapping. Another key objective is to ensure that the rigorous protocols for assigning unique IDs are followed and that the origin of each camera-trapped tiger image

is authenticated by responsible officials or scientists. This avoids the 'contamination' of the database through deliberate or accidental introduction of spurious tiger images of dubious origin. A third objective is to ensure that photo-capture dates and locations are entered accurately, to facilitate rigorous analyses of the data using spatially explicit capture–recapture models, as required by the new survey and estimation protocols already mandated by NTCA (http://projecttiger.nic.in/whtsnew/Protocol_Camera_trap.pdf).

The initiative to establish the UTID database was taken by Dr Rajesh Gopal, Director of Project Tiger, in October 2011 after a series of consultations with leading tiger researchers in India, including Dr Ullas Karanth of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and and Dr Y.V. Jhala of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). A range of data collection and camera-trap sampling protocols, based on experience from the large-scale monitoring projects for tigers across India by WCS and WII, have been incorporated into the processes involved in generating field data. The pattern matching software *Extract Compare*, which speeds up individual identifications from stripe patterns on tigers (http://www.conservationresearch.co.uk), developed by Lex Hiby of Conservation Research, UK, with assistance from WCS scientists, will provide a robust and flexible platform. The database will be officially titled the National Repository of Camera Trap Photographs of Tigers (NRCTPT). It is anticipated that > 1,400 individual tigers camera trapped by WCS and WII surveys conducted after 1 January 2006 will form the initial core of the database. Subsequently, it is anticipated that the database will expand through active participation of other researchers conducting camera trap surveys and with authenticated tiger images obtained from other sources such as police seizures of skins, poached tigers, conflict related removals, and tourist or other incidental photographs of tigers. Currently, the WCS database of tiger IDs in Karnataka has over 4,000 images of 600 individual tigers from multiple sources, used for rapid sharing of information with State Forest Department and NTCA in real time, as tiger conservation issues arise. Begun in 1986 by Dr Karanth and now covering an area of 4,000 km$^2$ of prime tiger habitat in Karnataka, this WCS project pioneered development of camera-trap surveys of tigers in 1991. In the long term the NRCTPT project is expected to facilitate not just the accurate monitoring of key surviving source populations of India's national animal but also to help effective conservation decision making in case of human–tiger conflict incidents and to address the burgeoning problem of poaching of tigers across the country.

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## Regional dialogue to counter escalating large-scale transboundary poaching in Central Africa

Large-scale poaching in Central Africa, targeting elephants in particular, has reached dramatic levels. In early 2012 Cameroon was the scene of the latest slaughter, with > 300 elephants lost in Bouba Ndjida National Park, involving poachers from Sudan and elsewhere. This is just the latest example of an escalating phenomenon, resulting from the spillover of armed conflicts, collapsing protected areas and lawlessness. Over the last 3 decades the northern Central African Republic has lost over 95% of its 35,000 elephants, and other wildlife. Since 2005 Zakouma National Park in Chad has lost 85% of its 4,000 elephants, and continues to lose them.

Widespread international attention and high-level political support has caused the Cameroonian Minister of Forestry and Wildlife to develop an emergency action plan to secure the protected areas of its northern border. Contributing to the regional component of this plan, the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), with support from the Réseau des Aires Protégées d'Afrique Centrale and the German Technical Development Cooperation, organized a meeting in June 2012 of ministers of the Central African Republic, Chad and Cameroon, to initiate a dialogue on reinforced transboundary anti-poaching control. In a preparatory meeting the directors of wildlife, park wardens and other delegation members exchanged experiences on the Bouba Ndjida massacre. The Central African Republic delegation presented information on the passage of 150 and 80 men through Sangba, in the north, 4–6 weeks after they left Cameroon heavily loaded with tusks and after having killed seven elephants. In November 2012 we received information from the northern Central African Republic of sightings of presumed poachers, returned from Sudan earlier than expected. A health worker, who treated one of them, reported he was from the group that poached the Bouba Ndjida elephants. Two columns of heavily armed men were subsequently observed heading towards the Chadian border. One elephant was reported killed. The most recent report at the time of writing (February 2013) is that the group had reportedly split up, some observed again around Bouba Ndjida National Park whereas others had moved into the forested south-west of the Central African Republic.

The three countries signed a declaration on the reinforcement of combating cross-boundary poaching, highlighting the interest in wildlife survival, as well as of security of personnel in border areas. In the declaration's implementation plan each of the three countries commits itself to submitting the necessary budgets for anti-poaching and improving the status of protected area personnel. In addition, a road map was signed to operationalize the cooperation agreement of the Bouba Ndjida–Sena