

Creation of an action plan for the conservation of freshwater mammals in Venezuela

During 7–10 July 2016 a workshop was held to establish an action plan for the conservation of the threatened freshwater mammals of Venezuela. The workshop was attended by more than 30 specialists, including representatives of the Ministry of Popular Power for Eco-socialism and Water, Fundación Omacha and WWF-Colombia.

On the first day of the workshop knowledge about the river dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis* and *Sotalia guianensis*), giant otters (*Pteronura brasiliensis* and *Lontra longicaudis*) and manatee *Trichechus manatus* in Venezuela was evaluated. This facilitated identification of the main threats and gaps in information, and priority areas for conservation of the species. The main threats identified were habitat loss as a result of damming of rivers for agriculture, use of irrigation systems for residential development, and deforestation and sediment removal; pollution from oil and gas extraction activities in Maracaibo Lake, and from the mining industry along the lower Orinoco River; illegal hunting for meat (manatees and dolphins) and for use as bait (dolphins) and pets (otters); and negative interaction with fisheries.

During the second day separate working groups for river dolphins, otters and manatees discussed (1) research and monitoring, (2) sustainable management, (3) information and its dissemination, (4) education, participation and training, and (5) management and institutions. On the third day the results were shared in a plenary session, and priorities common to each of the groups were identified. Finally, a financial strategy was discussed, identifying potential sponsor institutions and stakeholders.

The research needs identified were studies of the distribution, population size, genetics, biology and ecology of these mammals and the quantification of each of the identified threats. The outcome of the workshop will be the first action plan dedicated to the conservation of these species, by the Ministry of Popular Power for Eco-socialism and Water, framed within the national strategy for the conservation of biodiversity of Venezuela. This workshop methodology could be used for the formulation of conservation strategies at the national level for other groups of threatened species.

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Leveraging public funding to secure a protected area in the Western Ghats, India

Protected areas serve as refuges for threatened species worldwide, and in India, although these areas constitute < 5% of the country, they are rich habitats for tigers, elephants and other globally threatened species. In many cases people were residing within these protected areas prior to their notification, posing two problems. Firstly, in addition to suffering conflicts with wildlife, people residing within the protected areas are denied basic facilities such as medicine, education or electricity. Secondly, disturbance by people, even at low levels, can negatively affect threatened species.

The c. 600 km² Kudremukh National Park, in the Western Ghats, south-west India, with its shola grasslands and evergreen forests, was declared in 1987 to protect a newly discovered population of the Endangered lion-tailed macaque *Macaca silenus*. The Park continues to harbour one of the largest extant populations of the species but is also home to c. 1,380 families residing in 42 settlements. Many residents have demanded development of infrastructure, although this would violate existing conservation laws.

The Indian government and the Wildlife Conservation Society India Program (WCS India) and its conservation partners view voluntary and fair resettlement of people from within National Parks as of benefit to all parties: resettled families obtain access to land, electricity, health care and education, and habitat is consolidated for threatened species. WCS India has been involved in successful village resettlement programmes in India for more than 2 decades, improving the welfare of more than 1,500 families through support of government-sponsored relocation projects and by providing extensive post-resettlement assistance (see *Oryx*, 48, 484–485, & 50, 205–206).

During 2000–2003 WCS India and its conservation partners, supported by donors that include philanthropist Vikram Nagaraj and Microsoft Corporation, initiated a privately-funded resettlement programme involving eight families from Kudremukh, with the approval and support of the Park authorities. This small intervention, the first of its kind for the Park, triggered a chain of events. Residents of Kudremukh, who were previously at an impasse, recognized in resettlement an outcome that could address their problems. With the Society's support c. 500 families residing within Kudremukh, including forest-dwelling tribal communities, formally applied to the government for resettlement to locations outside the Park.

About 200 families have so far been resettled from Kudremukh under the State government-sponsored scheme, receiving INR 547,000,000 (c. USD 8,000,000) as compensation and financial support. WCS India has invested c. 10% of this in supportive actions, including help with necessary documentation and follow-up with the