

INTERNATIONAL

Ramsar update

In September 1996 The Gambia joined the Ramsar Convention as the 94th Contracting Party and, in November, Israel and Malawi acceded. Botswana became the 97th Party in December and declared the Okavango Delta System a Ramsar site. The Ukraine formalized its status and became the 98th Party, although its accession will be back-dated from 1991. In February 1997 the Bahamas and Georgia acceded, and the Republic of Korea became the 101st contracting party on 28 March.

Sources: *The Ramsar Newsletter: Convention on Wetlands*, April 1997, 1; *Wetlands*, June 1997, 10–11.

News from CITES

A further six countries have acceded to CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Jamaica acceded on 24 March 1997, Yemen on 5 May, Myanmar on 13 June, Cambodia on 4 July, Antigua and Barbuda on 8 July and Uzbekistan on 10 July, bringing the total to 142. These accessions enter into force on 22 June, 3 August, 11 September, and 2, 6 and 8 October, respectively.

Source: CITES Secretariat, 9 July 1997.

Governments fail tigers

Twenty-three governments, who, at the 1994 CITES meeting in Florida, committed themselves to take urgent measures to save the tiger, have failed to carry out the recommended action. A review by TRAFFIC has shown

that governments representing nine countries with tigers (Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam) and 14 where trade in tiger parts is known to exist, have taken inadequate measures to prevent poaching and trade in tiger products.

Source: *Cat News*, Spring 1997, 2.

New forum for forests

An international convention on forests, proposed at the second Earth Summit in New York in July by the European Union, Canada, Malaysia, and some environmentalists, was strongly opposed by an unusual coalition of environmental groups and countries with large vested interests in forestry, such as Brazil, India and the USA. The proposing group says that a legally binding convention is the only way to stop uncontrolled logging, while the opposing nations believe that decisions on forests should be a national matter. Many environmental groups argue that a new convention will undermine other international agreements, such as the Biodiversity Convention agreed at the first Earth Summit 5 years ago, and they hope that forests can be protected without the bureaucracy of a new convention. Few dispute the need for rapid action to protect the world's forests and governments agreed to meet in 2000 for discussions under a new Intergovernmental Forum on Forests.

Source: *New Scientist*, 5 July 1997, 22.

Orchid action plan

An action plan to conserve the world's orchids was launched at Europe's largest orchid fair in Switzerland in April. It identifies habitat alteration or

destruction, which affects a wide range of orchids, and the illegal extraction of wild plants for trade, which affects species that produce showy flowers or edible products, as the major threats. The plan makes recommendations to protect these plants including the propagation of native species to help reduce the demand for wild-collected plants.

Source: IUCN, 17 April 1997.

EUROPE

Reindeer damage tundra

High densities of reindeer *Rangifer tarandus* have caused severe degradation of the tundra of northern Norway, within the Arctic Circle, damaging vegetation and soil. The reindeer population there has doubled in 40 years.

Source: *New Scientist*, 14 June 1997, 6.

Siberia pollutes Arctic

Wildlife across the Arctic is at risk from pollution from Siberian rivers flowing into the Arctic Ocean. A study, compiled by scientists from eight Arctic nations, and published in June at a science symposium in Norway, found discharges of polychlorinated biphenols (PCBs), industrial byproducts, and the pesticides DDT and lindane at concentrations hundreds of times greater than those found in North American and Scandinavian rivers. The rivers Ob, Yenisei and Pechora are the main sources and high levels of these pollutants were found in marine sediments, snow, fish, birds and mammals. Walruses, seals, porpoises, whales, gulls, sea eagles, foxes and polar bears are all thought to contain damaging levels.

Scientists are concerned that there may be a connection between pollution and the unusually high death rate of young polar bears on the Svalbard archipelago, 600 km north of Norway.

Source: *New Scientist*, 7 June 1997, 5.

Lynx hunt

Between 16 and 19 per cent of Norway's lynx *Lynx lynx* population (95 animals from an official quota of 146) were shot during the 2-month hunting season in 1997. Farmers claim that the lynx population has exploded in recent years, but conservationists still consider the species vulnerable or endangered. A recent evaluation estimated a total population of 500–600.

Source: *Cat News*, Spring 1997, 18.

PCBs harm otters

A study of European otters *Lutra lutra* has concluded that polychlorinated biphenols (PCBs) are an important contributory factor to the decline of otter populations in Europe. In Latvia, where otters still have a relatively high population density, concentrations of PCBs in otters, amphibians and fish were lower than reported in other areas in Europe. High PCB levels from Swedish samples, where the otter has disappeared from many areas, confirmed a link.

Source: *Ambio*, June 1997, 196–201.

Ban proposed for persistent chemicals

A committee of Swedish politicians has proposed a ban on the use of all chemicals that accumulate in the environment, regardless of whether they are known to be toxic. The committee recommends that by

2002 manufacturers should label products with information about the chemicals they contain and by 2007 all products on the market should be free from substances liable to bioaccumulate. Products should also be free from chemicals that have serious or irreversible effects on humans and the environment. The proposals will be included in a bill that will be submitted to parliament. The chemical industry is fiercely opposed to the bill.

Source: *New Scientist*, 5 July 1997, 22.

North Atlantic exploitation

Scientists are concerned that exploitation of the North Atlantic could damage important marine ecosystems and threaten 21 species of cetaceans. The oil industry is developing the Atlantic Frontier off north-west Scotland and many major oil companies have been awarded exploration licences. Seismic testing, which may disrupt marine mammals, will be carried out and British Petroleum (BP) is already due to start producing from the first oil field. The Scottish Association for Marine Science is participating in a £1.8-million study of the environmental impact of oil development in the area, funded by the government and the oil industry. Biological surveys of the area have not been completed, however. The research includes the first attempt to map the presence of an unusual cold-water coral *Lophelia pertusa*. BP insists that measures will be taken to protect the coral. The Marine Conservation Society, The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Greenpeace UK have made official complaints to the

European Commission.

Sources: Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, 13 May 1997; *New Scientist*, 7 June 1997, 10.

Territorial problems for beavers

Beavers *Castor fiber*, which were reintroduced into two national parks in The Netherlands in 1988, claimed large territories – up to 50 km compared with a normal 1.5 km of riverbank – and left little unclaimed land for later reintroductions, according to a report in the *Journal of Zoology*. Subsequent reintroductions resulted in animals wandering for months trying to find unmarked habitat. These latecomers were found to be five times more likely to die within a year compared with earlier arrivals, possibly due to stress affecting their vulnerability to disease. The experience gained from this project may help scientists now relocating beavers from Bavaria to Croatia.

Source: *New Scientist*, 26 April 1997, 6.

Italian fishermen receive compensation

European Union ministers have agreed on compensation for Italian fishermen to assist with the phase-out of their driftnet fleet. The Italian fisheries, estimated at more than 600 boats, have been using nets up to 12 km long. The EU legislation limits nets to 2.5 km.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, June 1997, 25.

Road threatens rare plant

The only known population of the dioecious *Borderea chouardii* (Dioscoreaceae) in Aragón, Spain, may be in danger from plans to improve a road that already runs through the

population. This relict species, which is considered a priority by the European Union, is the first endangered plant in Spain to have a recovery plan.

Source: *Quercus*, April 1997, 31–33.

Monk seal tragedy

More than half the population of endangered Mediterranean monk seals *Monachus monachus* may have been wiped out along the coast of north-west Africa. The mass mortality was initially reported on 19 May and by the end of the month 81 corpses had been found. Less than half the usual number of seals have been recorded at their caves along the Cabo Blanco Peninsula and scientists estimate that over 150 animals may have perished. Spanish researchers have identified three species of highly toxic dinoflagellates in the water near the main seal caves. Tissue analysis of seal corpses found more than 20 neurotoxins produced by dinoflagellates. The surviving seals may be removed from the affected area until dinoflagellate concentrations have returned to normal.

Sources: *New Scientist*, 21 June 1997, 5; *BBC Wildlife*, July 1997, 21.

NORTH EURASIA

Russia's 32nd national park

An area of the Kaluga Region in Russia (200–250 km south-west of Moscow), encompassing the basins of the two largest tributaries of the Oka, the Ugra and Zhizdra Rivers, was designated a national park by the Russian Prime Minister on 10 February 1997. Ugra National Park, the result of a 7-year campaign, is Russia's 32nd

national park.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, Spring 1997, 4.

New reserve for goose

On 15 January 1997 the State Nature Reserve Shoininski, on the Kanin Peninsula in north-east Russia, was established by a decree from the Governor of the Nenets Autonomous Territory. The reserve covers 16,400 ha, including a key stop-over site for the rapidly diminishing north European population of lesser white-fronted goose *Anser erythropus*. Hunting and trapping in the reserve is permitted only for scientific research.

Source: *Birdlife in Europe*, June 1997, 5.

Tigers over-estimated

Russian scientists have developed a new technique for surveying Siberian tigers *Panthera tigris*, which reduces the possibility of counting animals more than once. Scientists, working in the Lazovsky State Nature Reserve in Russia's Primorsky Krai region, have trained dogs to distinguish between the odours of individual tigers and have used this method to estimate the population in the reserve. They recorded 12 tigers in total, far fewer than a recent survey carried out for the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which estimated 22. In the region between the Amur River and the Pacific coast the WWF survey counted tiger tracks in the snow to estimate an overall population of 415–475 tigers, almost twice that of previous surveys. Extrapolation of the Russian scientist's figures gives a lower estimate of about 250 tigers.

Sources: *New Scientist*, 12 July 1997, 18; 2 August 1997, 50.

Ukrainian protected areas

Two new national parks have been established in the Ukraine. Podolski Tovtry National Park in Khmelnitcki Region encompasses 261,316 ha, although only 3051 ha is managed directly by the park and much remains in use by private landowners. Svyaty Gory (Sacred Mountains) National Park covers 40,589 ha in eastern Ukraine and is the country's 7th national park. The Ukraine has also acquired its 17th Zapovednik, Gorgany Zapovednik in Ivano-Frankovskii region, which covers 5344 ha of the Carpathian Mountains.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, Spring 1997, 4.

NORTH AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

North African collaboration

Botanists and conservationists from Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia have been working with the IUCN to identify wild plants used as medicines that are threatened and formulate a strategy for their conservation. The five countries are participating fully in the work even though they have had few links with each other in the past and Libya has little contact with the West, and despite civil war in Algeria.

Source: *Plant Talk*, July 1997, 12.

Tourist threat to IPA

The slopes of Baba Dag, in the west Toros Mountains, Turkey, are at risk from tourist developments that include plans for a holiday village, hotels and a cable car. The area is near Fethiye in the south-west of the country, which has seen much tourist development in recent

years, especially at the beach of Olü Deniz. Baba Dagħ, with its pine and cedar forests and endemic bulbs, is classified as an Important Plant Area and has a rich endemic flora.

Source: *Plant Talk*, July 1997, 17.

Threat to oryx resumes

Arabian oryx *Oryx leucoryx* in Oman are again threatened by poachers, who have taken at least 40 animals during the last 18 months. Many animals are thought to have been caught alive and smuggled out of the country for sale to private zoos and animal collectors in the Middle East. Bedouin rangers first became aware of poaching in February 1996, with the loss of several calves. More were taken later in the year and by the end of the summer adult animals were also being caught. There were signs that animals had been chased to a state of collapse with some left to die in the desert. More oryx have been taken in recent months and the loss of calves and breeding females will have a significant impact on the small population. New laws have been passed increasing the maximum penalty for theft of wildlife from a 3-month sentence to 5 years. The profits of the illegal trade are high, however, and preventing further losses will be difficult. Source: *BBC Wildlife*, August 1997, 24.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Does handling harm dogs?

A study of stress hormones in the faeces of African wild dogs *Lycaon pictus* has shown no difference in levels of the hormone corticosterone in dogs that have been darted,

vaccinated against rabies and fitted with a radio collar, compared with those that have never been handled. The research may help to dispel controversy surrounding an outbreak of disease that nearly wiped out the population of dogs in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park during 1991. It has been suggested that biologists vaccinating and radio-collaring dogs were partially to blame for the outbreak.

Handling the dogs was thought to raise stress levels and increase production of hormones that suppress the immune system. Wildlife biologists hope that a final decision on the merits of collaring will come from the IUCN/SSC Canid Action Plan.

Source: *New Scientist*, 24 May 1997, 5.

Logging in Central Africa

Investigations by the Rainforest Foundation have revealed that most of the forested land in Cameroon, Congo and Gabon has been parceled out to logging firms or slated for cutting in the near future, including areas supposedly protected for conservation. Logging companies say that their activities pose no threat to the forests because only a few trees are taken from each hectare. However, there is increasing evidence that even selective felling of hardwood trees can cause long-term changes to the complex ecology of the forest. The indirect impact of logging may be even more severe, with a burgeoning bushmeat trade supplying wild animals for consumption in boom towns around sawmills. Roads and tracks made by the loggers also increase the area of forest easily accessible to hunters. In the Congo Republic a logging concession has been



Wild dogs in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania (S. Sassoon).

granted along the boundaries of Nouabale-Ndoki Reserve, one of the last refuges of the bongo *Tragelaphus euryceros*. French and Asian logging companies are present in the buffer zones of the Lopé Reserve in Gabon, the Korup and Campo protected areas in Cameroon, and the Conkouati Reserve in the Congo Republic. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), where political instability has discouraged logging companies from risking investment, there are now fears that the new government will encourage logging as a means to salvage the country's ruined economy. Source: *BBC Wildlife*, July 1997, 28.

Mountain gorilla losses

In May unconfirmed reports state that at least four mountain gorillas *Gorilla gorilla beringei* were shot dead during a gun battle in the Parc National des Virunga, Democratic Republic of Congo. The area is too dangerous for the authorities to confirm the number of deaths and the whereabouts and condition of the gorilla group. Source: International Gorilla Conservation Programme, 30 July 1997.

Elephant deterrent

Loki Osborn, a zoologist from the University of Cambridge, UK, is working with Jack Birochak, a Pennsylvanian inventor, to develop a pepper spray to deter problem elephants. Traditionally farmers frighten elephants away by shouting, beating drums and throwing rocks, but crop-raiding elephants are now increasingly shot. In Zimbabwe about 100 elephants are killed every year in animal control action. Spray tests on wild elephants in Zimbabwe have been successful; the elephants freeze, blow their trunks then leave rapidly. The chilli pepper used in the spray does no permanent harm.

Source: *New Scientist*, 19 April 1997, 25.

Group calls for eco-tourism

At its first conference, earlier this year, the newly formed Okavango Peoples' Wildlife Trust (OPWT) called for a complete ban on safari hunting in the Okavango Delta, Botswana. The OPWT aims to promote the delta as a wilderness safari area, replacing existing hunting concession areas with eco-tourism and low-impact safari camps.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, July 1997, 29.

Outbreak of buffalo TB

Nearly half of the Cape buffalo *Syncerus caffer* herds in Kruger National Park have been affected by an outbreak of *Mycobacterium bovis*, the bacterium that causes bovine tuberculosis. In the south of the 2-million-ha park, few herds remain unaffected by the disease and 85 per cent of the animals in some herds carry the

bacterium. There is concern that bovine TB could spread into domestic cattle along the park's western boundary and local people are at risk from *M. bovis*, which causes symptoms similar to human TB. There is also a possibility of spread into other species. Three lions *Panthera leo*, two cheetahs *Acinonyx jubatus* and a troop of baboons *Papio ursinus* have already been infected, probably by eating diseased buffalo meat, and six kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros* have been struck down by a different strain from an unknown source. TB may have been present at low levels in the buffalo since the 1960s, when cattle on a farm at the park's southern boundary suffered from an outbreak of the disease. Efforts are being made to contain the disease.

Source: *New Scientist*, 5 July 1997, 13.

Over-excited elephants

Field trials of an elephant contraceptive implant in South Africa's Kruger National Park (*Oryx*, 31 [2], 99) have been suspended because of behavioural problems. The oestrogen-only implants, tested on 10 elephant cows *Loxodonta africana*, made the animals appear as if continually in oestrus, which solicited constant unwanted attention from elephant bulls. The excited bulls would not leave the females alone, causing distress and, in some cases, the separation of mothers from calves. Research may continue using combinations of hormones. Scientists from ZooMontana and the University of Pretoria have been working on an alternative immuno-contraception programme in the park.

Source: *New Scientist*, 31 May 1997, 5.

Right whales increase

The annual survey of southern right whales *Balaena glacialis* off the Cape Coast of South Africa has shown a dramatic population increase. In 1996 a total of 146 females with infants were recorded. In 1995 more than 100 were counted for the first time since the survey began in 1969. The survey had previously recorded an average increase of about 7 per cent and scientists do not expect the large increase to occur again next year. Right whales have shown big fluctuations in recruitment in the past and a gradual westward population shift may have also affected figures.

Source: *Our Living World*, June 1997, 10.

Prospectors in reserves

Rumours of precious gem stones have resulted in an influx of about 14,000 prospectors into two of Madagascar's most important nature reserves – the Analamera Special Reserve and the Ankarana Reserve. The prospectors hunt in the reserves, endangering wildlife such as the Perrier's, or black, sifaka *Propithecus diadema perrieri*, a subspecies confined to Analamera. The sifakas have survived to date because they are taboo food for local people but many of the gem-hunters have different traditions. The Malagasy Government has expressed concern but has difficulty enforcing the law in remote areas. Few gemstones have been found by the prospectors.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, July 1997, 25.

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SOUTH & SOUTH EAST ASIA

Asiatic lions killed

Local press reports in April 1997 claim that 40 of the last Asiatic lions *Panthera leo* in the Gir Lion Sanctuary, India, have been killed in road and rail accidents. About 300 lions remain in the sanctuary, which is crossed by numerous roads, including five state highways, and by a railway line. Over 100,000 vehicles use the roads annually. More than 16 lions have been killed in the past year by poachers, for teeth, claws and skin, and by poisoning and electrocution. Stone mining leases have been granted by the Gujarat Government on the edge of the sanctuary, despite government guidelines that no mining should be allowed within 5 km of the boundary, and some cattle breeders farm within the sanctuary. Gujarat's Chief Minister has declared that no Asiatic lions will be allowed to be moved from the state, undermining plans to establish a second home for the lions at Palpur Kuno in Madhya Pradesh. *Source: Cat News*, Spring 1997, 12–14.

Real and fake skin trade increases

The illegal trade in animal skins in India is increasing. Between 1 January and 14 May 1997 police seized 15 tiger skins, 3 tiger skulls and 37 leopard skins from poachers and traders; 31 people were arrested. Cuttack, the capital of Orissa, has become a focal point of illegal wildlife trade in eastern India, especially in tiger and leopard skins and ivory. The number of fake skins on the market in India has also increased substantially in recent

years. The skins of domestic animals are dyed and painted to resemble tiger and leopard skins and are sold illegally, as the real thing. The huge scale of the trade in fakes indicates the scale of demand for real skins and adds fuel to the trade. The quality of the fakes is increasingly high and wildlife officers and other enforcement agencies are wasting time and resources investigating fakes. *Sources: TigerLink News*, June 1997, 28; *Cat News*, Spring 1997, 89.

Yak sightings in India

Even 100 years ago yak *Bos grunniens* only occasionally crossed the border from Tibet to India and were found in small numbers in the Changchenmo Valley of the Karakoram Mountains, in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir. In recent years the last recorded sighting was in 1983, when 22 were seen in Changchenmo Valley. In July–August 1996 a six-member team from Jammu and Kashmir Department of Wildlife Protection surveyed the valley to confirm the presence of yak. A male yak was seen at Satlung Ygma and a herd of 47 at Satlung Parma, confirming the continued presence of yak in this area. *Source: Saleem-H-Faridi*, Dept. of Wildlife Protection, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, 9 April 1997.

New marsh sanctuary

The Wildlife Department of Sri Lanka has designated 810 ha of the Muthurajawela Marsh as a sanctuary. The marsh is home to 126 bird species and provides refuge for 40 migratory species. Small mammals such as wild hare, mongoose, otters and jackals are common. *Source: Loris*, December 1996, 41–42.

Bears tracked in Himalayas

Six Himalayan brown bears *Ursus arctos* have been fitted with radio-collars at the Deosai Plateau, a national park in the Pakistani Himalayas. Park personnel will track the animals and hope to discover their hibernation site. The research will help to assess whether the park is big enough to carry the population of 24 bears. *Source: Our Living World*, June 1997, 9.

Thai birds at risk

Construction of a tourist resort has begun on the Khao Daeng Beach in Thailand, adjacent to the Sam Roi Yot National Park. Beach-nesting birds including the Malaysian plover *Charadrius peronii* are at risk. *Source: World Birdwatch*, June 1997, 3.

Rare partridge discovered

A team from the BirdLife Vietnam Programme, Amsterdam University and the National Museum of Natural History, Leiden has confirmed the presence of the orange-necked partridge *Arborophila davidi*, known only from a single specimen collected in 1927, in the Cat Loc Nature Reserve, Vietnam. During a week-long visit the researchers made over 25 sightings of the partridge in a variety of habitats including scrub, bamboo and secondary evergreen forest. Large areas of primary forest in the reserve are being cleared for cashew-nut cultivation and the reserve is unprotected despite supporting Vietnam's only population of Javan rhinoceros *Rhinoceros sondaicus*. *Source: World Birdwatch*, June 1997, 2.

Fishing threat to peafowl

A concession to develop 50 ha of fish ponds inside the Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam has been granted to a French company. The ponds will destroy grasslands that provide forage and display areas for the globally threatened green peafowl *Pavo muticus*.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, June 1997, 3.

Forgotten pig found

The Indo-Chinese warty pig, *Sus bucculentus* has been rediscovered more than a century after it was first described.

Allied to the Javan warty pig, *S. verrucosus*, *S. bucculentus* was first described from two skulls collected in Vietnam in 1898, but even these skulls were lost until last year, when they were finally unearthed by Colin Groves in the Academia Sinica in Beijing. No other records were made until January 1995, when an incomplete skull of a juvenile male was obtained by George Schaller and Khamkhoun Khounboline from an indigenous hunter in the Annamite Range of central Laos near the Laos/Vietnam border.

Source: *Nature*, 386, 335.

North Sulawesi closed to logging

In October 1996 logging concessions were banned in South East Sulawesi, Indonesia. Now the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry has also closed North Sulawesi to new forest concessions because of the poor condition of forest in the area.

Source: *Down to Earth*, May 1997, 16.

Plantation in park

A oil-palm nursery, recently opened on the island of Siberut,

Indonesia, may be the first stage of a plan to create a vast oil-palm plantation. Local non-governmental organizations believe that the villagers have been bribed or tricked into accepting the nursery, which is located in the buffer zone of the Siberut National Park.

Indonesia's minister for police and security warned park managers not to support community opposition to the plantation. The park was established in 1992 when President Suharto cancelled plans for oil palm plantations, refused extensions to logging concessions and designated the 1900-km protected area. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded a £17 million management plan for the park. The project claimed to be a model for biodiversity conservation but after 5 years the park boundaries have still not been finalized. The ADB has sent consultants to Siberut to review the situation.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, June 1997, 29.

Caged bird species decline

New reports produced by Birdlife International's Indonesia Programme recommend a ban on capturing birds for the cage-bird trade and increased legal protection for cage-bird species. The Java sparrow *Padda oryzivora* and the straw-headed bulbul

Pycnonotus zeylanicus are popular cage birds but numbers of both species are declining rapidly in the wild. Source: *World Birdwatch*, June 1997, 4.

Local people defy government

Islanders on Yamdena, the largest of the Tanimbar Islands in Indonesia, are challenging the government in the country's

Supreme Court in an attempt to stop the logging of their primary rain forest. The forest contains rare plants and endemic bird species, including egrets and cockatoos. The Indonesian Forestry Department issued a government decree in 1971 stating that only conservation and research activities should be allowed in the forests. In 1995, however, a logging concession, allowing the exploitation of 50 per cent of Yamdena's forests, was granted to a state-owned company. The islanders argue that, according to traditional land law, the forest and land area is owned by local people. Last year the Tanimbar Intellectuals Association, a community group representing the islanders, brought a legal case against the Ministry of Forestry claiming that the government neglected to consult with the people and carry out an environmental impact assessment, both of which are required by Indonesian law before a concession can be issued. The islanders lost their case in both the local and regional courts and the Supreme Court is their last chance to save the forest. Source: *BBC Wildlife*, August 1997, 28.

EAST ASIA

Inadequate trade controls

Recent investigations by TRAFFIC have found flaws in trade controls in some Asian countries that allow the smuggling of whale meat and ivory with ease. Legal loopholes and lax controls in Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea allow a flourishing trade in illegal whale meat. Difficulties

in determining whether whale meat is from a legal source have led to calls for more stringent regulations and the report suggests a database of DNA profiles for all whale meat entering the market from legal stockpiles, bycatch and confiscations. Weaknesses in ivory trade controls for some Asian importing countries also make distinguishing between smuggled and legal ivory impossible. Parts of the trade control system in Japan are voluntary, which increases the chance of illegal ivory infiltrating the legal market. Sources: WWF, 28 April 1997; WWF, 14 May 1997.

White dolphins discovered

A study has discovered at least 250 Chinese white dolphins *Sousa chinensis* in Hong Kong waters, in and near the mouth of the Pearl River. In 1995 the dolphin seemed doomed to local extinction when the Hong Kong population fell to 85. Rising pollution is thought to be a major factor threatening the dolphin. Source: BBC Wildlife, July 1997, 27.

Bear discovery in Taiwan

Taiwan's largest protected species, the Formosan black bear *Ursus thibetanus formosanus*, has been recorded in Yushan National Park for the first time in 50 years. Amateur video footage captured the bear foraging for food. Source: International Conservation Newsletter, March 1997, 2-3.

Foot and mouth closes park

An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Taiwan has led to the closure of nature reserves and national parks. Yangmingshan, Yushan, Taroko, Kenting and

Sheipa National Parks have all taken precautionary measures and the Taipei Municipal Zoo and Hsinchu Municipal Zoo are closed until the outbreak is under control. Sika deer *Cervus nippon*, Reeve's muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*, serow *Capricornis crispus*, wild boar *Sus scrofa* and sambar *Rusa unicolor* in the parks are at risk. Source: International Conservation Newsletter, March 1997, 3-4.

Battle lost to save wetland

A 7-km-long sea wall across the neck of Isahaya Bay, Japan, was completed in April, cutting off Japan's largest area of tidal mudflats from the sea. A subsequent campaign to persuade the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to reflood the bay failed and a compromise scheme to convert the wall into a road-bridge was ignored. Isahaya was the most important fish-spawning ground in the Ariake Sea and a vital migratory-bird stop-off with more than 232 species recorded, 21 of them endangered, including Saunder's gull *Larus saundersi*. The reclamation project will create only 1600 ha of agricultural land for which no tenders have been received. Japan has 250,000 ha of unused farmland. Much of the planning was carried out in secret and the results of three environmental impact assessments were never published. Sources: BBC Wildlife, June 1997, 23 and July 1997, 23; New Scientist, 7 June 1997, 11.

Acidic lakes in Japan

A report by the Japanese Environment Agency predicts that many of Japan's lakes and marshes will become acidic within 30 years, with serious implications for the country's

wildlife. Rainfall was found to have a pH value of 4.4-5.4, despite stringent pollution controls. Much of the acidity is thought to originate from coal-fired power stations in China. Source: New Scientist, 3 May 1997, 13.

NORTH AMERICA

Parks undergo changes

A study by the World Wide Fund for Nature reveals that America's national parks are vulnerable to ecological changes caused by global warming. Many national parks and wildlife refuges are already showing signs of climate-related changes – plants previously found at lower altitudes are invading alpine meadows in Mt Rainier and Olympic National Parks; spruce trees in Rocky Mountain National Park are undergoing unprecedented growth spurts; changes have been observed in caribou *Rangifer tarandus* migratory patterns in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; four million seabirds have disappeared from the US West Coast; and wetlands in Maryland's Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge have been inundated by rising sea levels. Source: WWF, 25 June 1997.

Fishing resumes in Canada

Only 4 years since a moratorium was imposed on the troubled Canadian cod fisheries, limited fishing is to resume off the east coast. During the next year fishermen will be permitted to catch 10,000 tonnes of cod off the south coast of Newfoundland, 6000 tonnes in the northern Gulf of St Lawrence and 2000 tonnes in the southern Gulf. The government's decision has

been criticized by fish scientists who say that there is no evidence that the stocks have recovered (*Oryx*, 31 [2], 103) and it has been suggested that the decision may be politically motivated. The quotas were based on the recommendations of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, a government-appointed body of fishermen, industry representatives and academics. The Canadian Minister of Fisheries and Oceans says that fishing will stop if there is evidence that stocks are suffering. *Source: New Scientist*, 26 April 1997, 6.

Problems for polar bears

A study of polar bears *Ursus maritimus* at west Hudson Bay in Canada, conducted by Ian Stirling of the Canadian Wildlife Service, has shown a decline in the weight of bears of all ages and a drop in the survival rate of first-year cubs from 75 to 50 per cent since the early 1980s. The cause is unknown, but one theory suggests that global warming is melting snows earlier in the year and so shortening the seal-hunting season. The bears, which depend on ringed seals *Phoca hispida* for food, are starving. Lack of food may also cause bears to live off fat reserves in which toxic chemicals may have accumulated. *Source: Audubon*, May–June 1997, 20.

Protection sought for lynx

In May the US Wildlife and Fisheries Service (USWFS) announced that, although the Canada lynx *Lynx lynx canadensis* warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act, it will not be listed at present because other species are in more critical need. The

USWFS will re-examine its decision in 12 months. Environmental groups have campaigned for the lynx's protection since a controversial 1994 USWFS decision denied it protection. The USWFS admit that the species is threatened by habitat loss and modification, hunting, inadequate means to restore population and habitat, and increased human access to forests. The lynx was once resident in at least 16 states but is now only found in Montana, Washington, Wyoming and Maine. The greatest concentration of lynx, about 23 animals, is found at the Meadows, a 60,750-ha roadless area in Washington's Okanogan National Forest and Loomis State Forest. The US Forest Service plans to log 405 ha and cut 32 km of road into the Meadows, and Washington State intends to cut 4050 ha of Loomis Forest and build 240 km of roads. *Sources: Audubon*, May–June 1997, 22; *Cat News*, Spring 1997, 19.

Snowmobile tracks misled bison

The use of snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park has been blamed for creating trails away from the park that were followed by bison *Bison bison* during severe weather last winter. Over 1000 bison were killed after straying on to private land (*Oryx*, 31 [3], 174). *Source: BBC Wildlife*, July 1997, 24.

Habitat for flycatcher

Judge Roger Strand of the US District Court in Phoenix, Arizona, ordered the US Fish and Wildlife Service to designate 'critical habitat' to ensure the survival of the willow flycatcher *Empidonax traillii*. Only 300–500 nesting pairs of the bird remain. Work

carried out to map critical habitat for the bird in 1993 was never followed up and the bird may now be on the verge of extinction. Grazing and reservoir expansion have reduced the bird's rare desert wetland habitat. The Southwest Centre has sued the federal government for failing to properly assess risks to the bird posed by raising the water levels behind Roosevelt Dam. Winter rains could flood much of the flycatchers' habitat. *Source: Audubon*, July–August, 1997, 14.

Native Americans manage wolves in Idaho

During the past 2 years, 35 grey wolves *Canis lupus* have been reintroduced into central Idaho. With the exception of seven animals, all are accounted for and three breeding pairs have produced up to seven pups. The Nez Perce tribe organized the wolf's recovery and is responsible for monitoring, managing and conducting research on the wolves. This is the first native American tribe contracted to manage an endangered species for an entire state. *Source: Audubon*, May–June 1997, 19.

Hudson polluted

Tree swallows *Tachycineta bicolor* at the Hudson River, in the USA, have been found to carry alarming levels of polychlorinated biphenols (PCBs). The swallows are experiencing problems with reproduction and feather development, thought to be related to the pollution. High levels of these compounds are also found in herons and terns in the area. A related study found that PCBs dumped in the river by General Electric factories

until the 1960s, still remain and will not dissipate naturally.
 Source: *Audubon*, May–June 1997, 19.

Sturgeon decline

The population of Atlantic sturgeon *Acipenser oxyrinchus* in the Hudson River in the USA is decreasing. Overfishing in the 1800s decimated the species in many areas along the east coast but the Hudson was thought to offer a last refuge. It is thought that only 3000 fish remain of a population that totalled 25,000 in 1977. Last year the Atlantic States Marine Fishery Commission called for a ban on Atlantic sturgeon fishing.
 Source: *Audubon*, May–June 1997, 19.

Recovery for big-eared bat

Protection from human disturbance has allowed populations of the Virginia big-eared bat *Corynorhinus townsendii virginianus* to recover, increasing by as much as 350 per cent from 1983 to 1995 in some caves. Critical caves are closed to the public and entrances have gates or fences to prevent disturbance. Endangered Species Act protection is still required because the total population is still less than 20,000 bats.
 Source: *Endangered Species Bulletin*, May/June 1997, 12–13.

Missiles for mangrove

The US Department of Defence is planning to launch target missiles from an area of unspoiled mangrove islands. The unique area, just north of the Florida Keys, USA, is so fragile that jet-skis and boats are banned from some areas and reserves protect wildlife such as the great-white heron *Casmerodius albus*, white ibis

Eudocimus albus and white-crowned pigeons *Columba leucocephala*. The Department is studying the possible impacts of missile launches and a decision will be made by 1999.
 Source: *Audubon*, July–August 1997, 21.

CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

Community turtle project

A Guatemalan project is successfully involving local people in saving endangered sea turtles on the south coast of Guatemala near the village of Hawaii. The Hawaii Sea Turtle Conservation Programme, managed by the Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Association (ARCAS) encourages local egg collectors to donate 12 eggs from every nest plundered. In return they receive a receipt that allows them to sell the remainder 'legally'. The donated eggs are reburied in protected hatcheries.
 Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, April 1997, 51.

SOUTH AMERICA

Tree rat discovered

A new species of tree rat was discovered in French Guiana as its habitat was flooded by a new dam. Two rats, named *Isothrix sinnamariensis*, were rescued from flooded trees near the Sinnamary River, 20 km upstream from Petit Saut Dam.
 Source: *Mammalia*, 60, 393–406.

Hunt plan abandoned

A plan to resume the hunting of jaguars *Panthera onca* in Venezuela has been abandoned

after international protest. A world-wide ban on jaguar hunting has been in place since 1975 but the Venezuelan Government hoped to allow a shoot for several weeks a year and the export of up to 30 skins as trophies. About 100 jaguars are killed illegally by ranchers every year and the proceeds of the hunt may have funded a project to relocate the animals away from cattle-ranching areas.
 Source: *BBC Wildlife*, July 1997, 23.

Conflict in the Galápagos

Conflict between illegal fishermen and the Galápagos National Park Service has led to an armed attack on park officials. A park warden was seriously injured by shots fired by sea-cucumber fishermen while investigating their illegal camp. Staff have also been threatened since the capture of a fishing boat. Illegal fishing for sea cucumbers and sharks, and industrial fishing are threatening efforts to conserve the Marine Reserve (*Oryx*, 31 [3], 176).
 Source: *Noticias de Galápagos*, May 1997, 3.

Plant found after 16 years

Two scientists from the Charles Darwin Research Station have discovered a tiny population of the Floreana flax *Linum cratericola*, the first observation of the species for 16 years. The plant has only ever been found on Floreana Island at two sites on extinct volcanic craters. The areas have been damaged by feral donkeys and goats, and one has been invaded by the introduced shrub *Lantana camara*. A protection and reintroduction plan is being drawn up by the Galápagos National Park and the Charles Darwin Research Station.
 Source: *Noticias de Galápagos*, May 1997, 3–4.

Park bought for Chile

An American businessman, Douglas Tompkins, has bought a huge tract of land, 2500 km south of the Chilean capital Santiago, in an ambitious project to establish a nature reserve. After initial suspicion from the Chileans and opposition from nationalists, the military and development-minded politicians, his plans to donate the park to the country are to go ahead. Tompkins will transfer ownership of the Pumalín Park to a special foundation and the government will grant the land sanctuary status, although government-approved mining companies and other businesses will be admitted under certain conditions. The nature reserve stretches across the country from the coast to the Argentinian border and includes the last remaining temperate rain forest. Cultural differences have caused problems in initiating the project and Tompkins' approach has been criticized by some as naive and insensitive. Sources: *The Conservationist Newsletter*, June 1997, 2–4; *The Guardian*, 4 August 1997, 10–11.

Penguins forage further

Competition from commercial fisheries and the effects of climate change on fish populations are forcing penguins to forage further than ever previously recorded. Magellanic penguins *Spheniscus magellanicus* from Argentina's Punta Tombo Reserve may spend up to 3 weeks travelling more than 480 km from their nesting sites to find food. Source: *BBC Wildlife*, July 1997, 24.



Magellanic penguin – in trouble in Argentina (*Ian Strange*).

AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND/ANTARCTICA

Exploration in Shark Bay

The authorities in western Australia have approved oil and gas exploration in the Shark Bay region. The area is a designated World Heritage Area and encompasses the world's largest seagrass bed, the highest density of dugongs *Dugong dugon* in Australia and a population of 7000–8000 turtles. Three permits were granted by the former state mines minister without consulting either the public or the federal government. The work is to be carried out outside the Shark Bay Marine Park, which occupies the southern portion of the heritage area. Environmentalists are calling for the park's boundaries to be extended to match that of the World Heritage Area and for full protection to be extended to the entire area. Source: *BBC Wildlife*, June 1997, 26.

Herbicide ban

The government of Australia has banned the use of 84 herbicide products near water because of their impact on frogs and tadpoles. The products contain a detergent additive (a dispersant or wetting agent) that interferes with cutaneous respiration in frogs and gill respiration in tadpoles. Source: *Froglog*, March 1997, 2.

Australian rhinos

Scientists from Australia have requested permission from South Africa to transport several black rhinoceros and white rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis* and *Ceratotherium simum*, respectively) to Queensland, Australia, to establish breeding colonies for the species. Two sanctuaries are planned – one of 5000–10,000 ha and another of 100,000–200,000 ha – in an area of degraded savannah. Some people believe that efforts should be concentrated on protecting the species *in situ* and that Australian conservationists should be more concerned with native species. Source: *New Scientist*, 21 June 1997, 10.

Swamp saved

Fivebough Swamp near Leeton, New South Wales, Australia, has been saved from plans to create an aquatic recreation park that would have destroyed habitat and disturbed wildlife. The area provides refuge for over 50,000 water birds during the year and is crucial for migratory waders. Source: *World Birdwatch*, June 1997, 4.

No to beach cleaners

The Yolngu, the traditional aboriginal owners of north-east

Arnhem Land in Australia, have refused the use of beach cleaning equipment because of concerns about environmental impacts such as disturbance to sea turtle nesting sites. The tractor-drawn cleaner removes the top 15–20 cm of sand and passes it through a filter.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, April 1997, 19–20.

Horses rounded-up

The government of New Zealand has successfully removed 1200 wild horses from the northern Kaimanawa tussock lands. A census in April showed that the herd had multiplied tenfold in 17 years and threatened to destroy the habitat if left unmanaged. A cull planned the previous year was postponed after protest from animal rights groups. The animals were rounded-up for auction but it is feared that many will be sold for slaughter.

Source: *Forest and Bird Conservation News*, May 1997, 2–3.

Kakapo success

The critically endangered kakapo *Strigops habroptilus* has had a successful breeding season. Four chicks hatched on Codfish Island, New Zealand, increasing the population to 54.

Source: *Psitta scene*, May 1997, 1.

Snapper catch reduced

The New Zealand High Court has ruled that the north-eastern snapper catch be reduced from an unsustainable 5000 tonnes to 3000 tonnes. The fishery extends from North Cape to the Bay of Plenty and is New Zealand's largest snapper fishery. The Hanraki Gulf–Bay of Plenty snapper population has been reduced to less than 15 per cent of its original level. It is hoped that the reduction in

quotas will allow stocks to rebuild over 10 to 15 years. The fishing industry is taking the case to the Court of Appeal.

Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation News*, May 1997, 4.

Aliens excluded

A multispecies exclusion fence has been designed for a project that will enclose the 252-ha Karori valley on the edge of Wellington City, New Zealand. The fence was designed with five introduced species in mind; possums, cats, rats, mice and stoats, and tests have proved successful. The Karori Wildlife Sanctuary Trust aims to restore the ecology of the valley.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, May 1997, 5.

AWARDS

Scientists honoured for achievement

George Schaller, Jane Goodall and Birute Galdikas have been awarded the 1997 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement. George Schaller (the Wildlife Conservation Society's Director of Science) was honoured for his work on large mammals, Jane Goodall for 35 years of work on chimpanzees and Birute Galdikas for his research on orang utans. They share the prize of \$150,000.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, June 1997, 6.

PUBLICATIONS

Ethiopian Wolf Action Plan

The IUCN Canid Specialist Group (CSG) has produced an action plan for the Ethiopian wolf *Canis simensis*, a critically endangered canid found only in a few Afroalpine pockets of

the Ethiopian highlands. The action plan addresses the species's current status and distribution, genetics, disease epidemiology and control, population viability analysis, habitat conservation, captive breeding and metapopulation management. The final chapter summarizes conservation action needed. The CSG is coordinating a recovery programme to implement the plan's recommendations, including domestic dog vaccination and community education, monitoring and protection of wolf populations, and the establishment of a captive-breeding facility. Financial support is urgently needed to implement the plan. If you can help, or would like to order a copy of the action plan (£15, incl. postage), contact Dr Claudio Sillero, Conservation Officer, IUCN Canid Specialist Group, Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS, UK; Tel: +44 (0)1865 271289, Fax: +44 (0)1865 310447, e-mail: claudio.sillero@zoo.ox.ac.uk.

The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals

(ISBN: 0-12-408355-2, 450pp, £29.95), published by Academic Press, lists all 1150 African mammals with 480 new illustrations and 280 maps. It can be obtained from Academic Press, Marketing Department, 24–28 Oval Road, London NW1 7DX, UK.

Harvesting Wild Species: Implications for Biodiversity Conservation

(ISBN: 0-8018-5574-8, 704 pp.), edited by Curtis H. Freese, is the result of a 3-year study undertaken by the World Wide Fund for Nature to explore the link between biodiversity conservation and the commercial consumptive use of wild

species. It can be obtained from the John Hopkins University Press, 2715 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21218-4319, USA.

Timber Production and Biodiversity Conservation in Tropical Rain Forests, (ISBN: 0-521-57282-7, 225pp. £40 or \$US69.95) written by Andrew Grieser Johns, is available from Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1223 312393, Fax: +44 (0)1223 315052.

World Mangrove Atlas (ISBN: 4-906584-03-9, 78pp. \$US60 plus \$US35 postage and packing) A comprehensive review of the distribution and status of mangroves, the result of 3 years research, has been published by the International Society for Mangrove Ecosystems. It is available from the International Society for Mangrove Ecosystems c/o College of Agriculture, University of the Ryukyus, Nishihara, Okinawa 903-01, Japan. Fax: +81 98 895 6602.

Bird guide to help charity
The *Guide to Bird-watching in Ecuador and the Galápagos Islands* by Brinley Best, Rob Williams and Tom Heijnen gives comprehensive information on the birdlife of Ecuador including the best sites for bird-watching. All proceeds from the 484-page book will go to the environmental charity Equafor, which carries out vital conservation work in the country. The book costs £24 and is available from the Natural History Book Service (see below).

Mailorder book service
Diversity, the new Natural History Book Service (NHBS) mail-order bookstore magazine,

is now available. Over 2000 environmental titles can be ordered directly by calling +44 (0)1803 865913 or by e-mail: orders@nhbs.co.uk. NHBS has a web site at <http://www.nhbs.com> and *Alert!*, a monthly e-mail guide to new and forthcoming titles, is available free of charge. A range of *Buyers Guides*, which select key literature for specific environmental book buyers, can also be obtained from Bernard Mercer, Tel: +44 (0)1803 867815; e-mail: nhbs@nhbs.co.uk.

MEETINGS

New Perspectives on Nocturnal Primates.
3 December 1997, London, UK. *Contact:* Dr Paul Honess, Anthropology Unit, School of Social Sciences and Law, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford OX3 0BP, UK. Fax: +44 (0)1865 483937; e-mail: phoness@brookes.ac.uk.

3rd International Congress on Wildlife Management in Amazonia. 3–7 December 1997, Santa Cruz, Bolivia. *Contact:* Tropical Conservation and Development Programme, Center for Latin American Studies, University of Florida, PO Box 115531, Gainesville FL 32611, USA. Fax: +1 (352) 392 0085, e-mail: tcd@tcd.ufl.edu.

18th Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation.
3 March 1998, Sinaloa, México. *Contact:* F. Alberto Abreu Grobois, Symposium President, Laboratorio de Conservacion y Manejo de Recursos Bioticos y Banco de Informacion sobre Tortugas Marinas (BITMAR), Estacion Mazatlán, Instituto de Ciencias del Mar y Limnologia-UNAM, A.P. 811, Mazatlán, Sinaloa 82000, Mexico. Tel: +52

(69) 852845/8; Fax: +52 (69) 826133; e-mail: abreu@servidor.dgsc.unam.mx.

Convention on Biological Diversity COP4. 4–15 May 1998, Bratislava, Slovakia. *Contact:* CBD Secretariat, Montreal. Fax: +1 (514) 2886588; e-mail: biodiv@mtl.net.

2nd Planta Europa Conference. 9–13 June 1998, Sweden. *Contact:* Johan Samuelsson, ArtDatabanken, SLU, Swedish Threatened Species Unit, PO Box 7007, SE-750 07 Uppsala, Sweden. Tel: +46 18 67 34 09, Fax: +46 181 673480; e-mail: plantaeuropa98@dha.slu.se.

Euro-American Mammal Congress. 20–24 July 1998, Galicia, Spain. *Contact:* Euro-American Mammal Congress, Laboratorio de Parasitologia, Facultad de Farmacia, Universidad de Santiago de Compestela, 15706 Santiago de Compestela, Spain. Fax: +34 81 593316; e-mail: galemys@pinarl.esic.es.

5th Botanic Gardens Conservation Congress. 14–18 September 1998, Cape Town, South Africa. *Contact:* Brian Huntley. Fax: +27 21 761 4687; e-mail: bgci98@nbict.nbi.ac.za

CORRECTION

The caption accompanying the photograph of a northern Luzon slender-tailed cloud rat *Phloeomys pallidus* in *Oryx*, 31 (3), 171, should have read Institute of Biology, University of the Philippines Diliman and should have been credited to Marisol Pedregosa/IB-UPD. We apologize for the error.