

INTERNATIONAL

News from CITES

Fiji acceded to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on 30 September 1997 (effective 29 December 1997), making Fiji the 143rd Party to CITES.

Source: CITES, 7 October 1997.

Ramsar Update

The Republic of Nicaragua ratified the Ramsar Convention on 30 July 1997 and declared The Guatuzos its first Wetland of International Importance.

This area, 43,750 ha of permanent and seasonal lagoons, rivers and creeks, is close to the Caños Negro Ramsar site in Costa Rica and both governments are considering the creation of a binational Ramsar site by combining the areas.

Monaco's accession was due to come into force on 20 December 1997. The principality's first site, as yet unnamed, covers c. 10 ha of coastline and shallow marine water. Jamaica has completed the formalities necessary for its accession to Ramsar as the 104th

Contracting Party, entering into force on 7 February 1998. The Black River lower Morass, Jamaica's largest freshwater wetland with an area of 5700 ha, has been designated as a Wetland of International Importance.

Sources: *Ramsar Newsletter*, September 1997, 1; Ramsar, 24 September and 17 November 1997.

Amphibian extinctions increase

Amphibians are suffering serious declines in the Pacific north-west of America, Central

America and Western Australia, and several species may be on the verge of extinction or even extinct, according to scientists at the Third World Congress of Herpetology, held in Prague during August 1997. Some declines may be attributed to habitat destruction, but losses have also occurred in protected areas. The effects of climate change and chemical contamination may be cause for concern – UV-B radiation, DDT and its derivatives, and chemicals that mimic the effects of hormones in particular. A protozoan parasite has infected frogs in Central America, causing skin thickening and eventually death. A similar organism may be responsible for mass deaths of frogs in Queensland, Australia.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, October 1997, 21–22.

El Niño threatens wildlife

The effects of the 1997 El Niño are beginning to be felt all over the world, with far-reaching implications for wildlife.

Scientists are predicting severe weather disruptions and ocean water temperatures have already risen 5–10°C in some areas.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, September 1997, 18–19.

Global survey of coral reefs

The first global survey of coral reefs, Reef Check, was carried out between 14 June and 31 August 1997 at 300 sites around the world. The results revealed that about 95 per cent of the world's coral has been damaged by overfishing, dynamite, poison, pollution and ships' anchors. Fish and shellfish that were once common have declined on the majority of reefs. The survey, carried out by 750 divers and

100 marine biologists, checked the numbers of 20 key species such as groupers and lobsters. The Indo-Pacific region was found to be badly affected and the high demand for reef fish has resulted in the loss of many large species.

Sources: Reef Check 1997, 20 November 1997; *New Scientist*, 23 October 1997, 5.

Albatrosses at risk

Research suggests that large numbers of albatrosses are dying from ingesting plastic, mistaking it for small fish and squid. The birds lose their appetites and starve to death. The plastic comes from numerous sources, much from the beaches and rivers of Asia and the Americas. The full extent of the problem is unknown and population trends are slow to emerge because albatrosses live for up to 50 years.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, July 1997, 497.

EUROPE

Second national park for Latvia

Kemeri National Park has been created in Latvia protecting 42,000 ha of wet forests, raised bogs, coastal wetlands and meadows that support bird species such as lesser spotted eagle *Aquila pomarina*, several woodpecker species, corncrake *Crex crex* and common crane *Grus grus*.

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

Golden eagles threatened by plantation

An area of moorland on the Kintyre peninsula in Scotland,

which provides vital feeding ground for the area's last surviving pair of golden eagles *Aquila chrysaetos*, is threatened by a UK Forestry Commission's afforestation plan. The birds and their habitats qualify for the highest level of protection under the European Union's Birds Directive. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds says that the Forestry Commission is failing to deliver sustainable forestry in line with Britain's international obligations; it is preparing a legal challenge in the European Court of Justice should the government give the plantation approval.

Source: *New Scientist*, 20 September 1997, 5.

National parks for Scotland

Scotland is to be granted a system of national parks, including Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. The Scottish Parliament will draw up the legislation when it convenes in 2000.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, November 1997, 32.

UK badger population increasing

The number of badgers *Meles meles* in the UK has risen by 77 per cent in the past 9 years, probably due to much lower levels of persecution, according to a survey by a team of professional biologists and a network of volunteers. Tough penalties for killing badgers since the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 have been an effective deterrent in many regions, but in northern England the survey found that 25 per cent of breeding sets had been dug out. The survey also found that suitable badger habitat had declined and that farmers were concerned that more badgers

may mean more opportunities for badgers to transmit TB to cattle. Ministry of Agriculture research, however, has found no link between badger density and the level of TB infection. Source: *New Scientist*, 23 August 1997, 10.

Fritillary decline

A review of all data on the pearl-bordered fritillary *Clossiana euphrosyne* has highlighted a steep decline in this species in the UK. The butterfly's range has decreased by 80 per cent in the 90 years since records began, 55 per cent in the last 15 years. A national survey in 1997 identified c. 300 colonies in total, many supporting very small populations that are highly vulnerable to extinction. Many new sites were discovered, however, and the review suggests conservation measures that may halt the decline of this species. Source: *Butterfly Conservation*, 14 November 1997.

Aircraft disturb seals

Seals at breeding grounds in the north German Wattenmeer National Park are being disturbed by low-flying NATO aircraft that have been taking part in manoeuvres in the area. The noise may have caused mother seals to flee, abandoning their young. Sixteen pups have been found since the flights began, those that survive will be released into the North Sea. Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, August 1997, 598.

Smugglers arrested

The German authorities believe that they have broken an international reptile smuggling ring, responsible for shipping

hundreds of rare and endangered reptiles, including Madagascar tree boas *Sanzinia madagascariensis*, spider tortoises *Pyxis arachnoides*, radiated tortoises *Geochelone radiata* and Madagascar ground boas *Acrantophis madagascariensis* – all protected by CITES – from Madagascar to Germany, and then to the US and Canada. An international law enforcement collaboration between US, Canadian and German authorities has resulted in the arrest of two men. Source: *TRAFFIC USA*, August 1997, 14–15.

Otters recover in central Poland

Surveys in 1996 showed a recovery of otter *Lutra lutra* populations in central Poland compared with surveys in the early 1990s, which found otters virtually absent from central Poland, although prevalent throughout the rest of the country. Otters, previously absent in almost the entire catchment of the River Bzura, which was severely affected by municipal and industrial sewage, are now present in most tributaries in the lower catchment and further upstream on the river itself. The Utrata, Pisia and Lasica rivers all recorded positive sites, as did the rivers and channels of the Kampinos National Park, where the species was extirpated in the 1970s, and in small channels and fishponds to the south of Warsaw within heavily developed areas. The improvement may be partly due to better effluent treatment. Source: *IUCN Otter Specialist Group Bulletin*, April 1997, 24–25.

Dam controversy continues

The Gabčíkovo dam on the River Danube has caused

controversy since construction began in 1977. Slovakia (then Czechoslovakia) and Hungary planned the joint construction of two dams, a Hungarian one at Nagymaros, north of Budapest and a Slovakian dam, upstream at Gabčíkovo. In the late 1980s Hungary pulled out of the project after public pressure and environmental assessments that advocated an end to the project. Slovakia persisted with its dam however, despite objections from Hungary, and, in 1992, water was diverted to power the Gabčíkovo plant. Slovakia is now taking between 70–80 per cent of the Danube's water, destroying flood plains and diminishing the river. Both countries have complained to the International Court of Justice in the Hague; Hungary claimed that diverting the river has dried out wetlands valuable to wildlife and village water supplies, while Slovakia complained that the absence of the Hungarian dam has reduced the power it can produce from its dam. The Court ruled that both sides must work together towards a solution that better accounts for the environmental impacts of the dam.

Source: WWF, 25 September 1997.

Vulture breeds in French Alps

On 29 August 1997 a young bearded vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* left its nest in Savoie in the French Alps, the first successful breeding of this species in the area for many years. The parents were both captive bred, the male having been released in 1988 and the female in 1989. The species vanished from the French Alps in 1920.

Source: Foundation for the Conservation of the Bearded Vulture (François Moutou).

Hungarian birds at risk from British farmers

Great bustard *Otis tarda* habitat in the Bihar region of Hungary is under threat from a consortium of UK farmers. The farmers have bought c. 6000 ha of land, in an area proposed for legal protection, by acquiring a share in a Hungarian company. Land-use restrictions had been agreed between the Hortobágy National Park and the company but the farmers claim ignorance of these and have threatened to plough the area if they do not receive adequate compensation. Source: *World Birdwatch*, September 1997, 2.

National park at risk

Spanish conservationists are calling for a halt to tourist developments in the Parque Nacional de los Picos de Europa in northern Spain. They claim that the park has been inadequately managed and that plans for new roads, road-widening schemes, a car park and a cable-car project violate the protected status of the park. The park was created in June 1995 to protect 64,660 ha of limestone mountains in northern Spain. Source: *BBC Wildlife*, October 1997, 27.

Eradication of alien squirrel halted

A potentially successful programme to eradicate grey squirrels *Sciurus carolinensis* from the Piedmont area of Italy has been stopped by animal welfare groups, which took the case to court, citing inhumane methods. The project leader says that eradication of grey squirrels from Italy is an urgent conservation priority and that the method used – live traps and the anaesthetizer alothane

– had been requested by non-governmental organizations. Source: *Aliens*, No. 5, 1997, 4.

NORTH EURASIA

Pipeline may cause pollution

The Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), has proposed the construction of oil storage facilities in the Abrauski Zadaznik (special purpose nature preserve), which may threaten the Black Sea and its coastal ecosystems. An oil spill in the closed marine system would be potentially disastrous and risks are increased by seismic activity and hurricanes in the region. The CPC was founded in 1992 to construct a 1500-km pipeline to transport crude oil from the Tenghiz deposit in Kazakhstan, across Russia, to a terminal on the Black Sea at Yuzhnaya Ozereika. An environmental assessment was halted in May 1996 at the request of CPC members. Local people, environmental organizations and public organizations have opposed the project and are demanding that the assessment is restarted and that it allows public participation.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, Summer 1997, 12–13.

Clearcutting in the Leningrad region

The Governor of the Leningrad region has been accused by environmentalists and members of his own administration of secretly granting logging concessions in protected forests on the Karelian Isthmus. Such action would violate local laws that stipulate logging rights be granted only through open and

public tenders. It may also contravene federal nature conservation and forestry laws. Logging trucks have been observed crossing the Russian–Finnish border and there is evidence of large-scale logging in protected forest near the village of Roshchino and the resort region along the Gulf of Finland.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, Summer 1997, 19–20.

Gold mining threat for Ramsar site ...

The discovery of a gold deposit in the immediate vicinity of Parapolski Dol in Koryakski Zapovednik (strict scientific nature reserve) in the far north-east of Russia, may lead environmental damage.

Canadian investors have been lobbying the government of the autonomous district for access to exploit the deposit, valued at \$1.5 billion. Mining plans would violate the area's protected status and development plans include the construction of an airport and the use of toxic reagents in the extraction process. Parapolski Dol is one of the largest habitats for ducks and geese in north-east Asia – 700,000 waterfowl migrate to the area and several thousand swans nest there. In September 1994 the Russian government included the area in a list of sites that fulfil the criteria of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, Summer 1997, 20.

... and World Heritage Site

The virgin forests of Komi Republic, in the north-west of the Russian Federation, which include Yugyd-Va National Park and Pechoro-Illychski Zapovednik and its buffer

zone, are under threat of exploitation for gold. The government of the Republic plans to revise the borders of the national park to allow mining in 200,000 ha. A gold mining project in the Kozhim River basin is already under way. The area was the first territory in Russia listed as a World Heritage Site.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, Summer 1997, 20.

Mass death of seals

Scientists suspect that dioxins and other toxic materials released into Lake Baikal, Siberia, may be responsible for a mass die-off of Baikal seals *Phoca sibirica* discovered on 26 May 1997. A special commission has been appointed to determine the cause. About 50 dead seals were found near the southern tip of the lake in the vicinity of the Baikal Pulp and Paper Plant. Many environmentalists suspect a link between the deaths and the discharge of chemicals from the plant although other theories include uncontrolled hunting and disease, which was responsible for a die-off in 1987–88. High concentrations of dioxins in the fat of Baikal's seals indicate that parts of the lake are severely polluted and exposure to dioxins in the environment has been shown to reduce the ability of seals to survive infections. The paper plant was ordered closed by officials after the 1980s die-off but to no avail. Legislation that will protect the lake has recently been passed by the State of Duma of the Russian Federation and will come into force when it is confirmed by the Council of Federations and the President.

Source: *Russian Conservation News*, Summer 1997, 25–26; *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, July 97, 496 and August 1997, 598.

New Ukrainian hunting law

A new hunting law in Ukraine breaches international treaties such as the Berne and Bonn Conventions and has been condemned by conservationists. It includes globally threatened species such as great bustard *Otis tarda*, corncrake *Crex crex* and otter *Lutra lutra* among game species and refers to broad groups of birds such as 'ducks', 'geese' or 'waders' that can be hunted. These groups include globally threatened species – lesser white-fronted geese *Anser erythropus*, red-breasted geese *Branta ruficollis* and slender-billed curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*.

Source: *Birdlife in Europe*, September 1997, 7.

NORTH AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

New gecko discovered

A new species of gecko *Tarentola mindiae* has been discovered by a zoologist from the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency. The gecko is found in isolated tamarisk and acacia groves in Egypt's Western desert. The species is described in the *African Journal of Herpetology*, 46 (1).

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, November 1997, 57.

Wetland at risk

Esmekaya Sazligi, a wetland in Turkey that provides valuable habitat for wintering geese and ducks, and breeding grounds for several pairs of common crane *Grus grus* and montagu's harrier *Circus pygargus*, is to be destroyed if the Turkish State Water Works' plans go ahead to construct a dam for irrigation.

Turkish conservationists say that the scheme is illegal under five Turkish laws, and threaten legal action unless the development is halted and an environmental assessment carried out.

Source: *Birdlife in Europe*, September 1997, 6.

Sustainable harvest for leeches

Medicinal leeches are collected from wetlands in Turkey for use in the pharmaceutical industry. The effects of this large-scale commercial collection are unknown and the Turkish authorities have fixed an export limit that has no scientific basis. A 2-year project to study the harvest of the medicinal leech in Turkey started in May 1997. The results will be used to recommend action to ensure that leeches in Turkey are managed on a sustainable basis.

Source: Harald Martens, Head, Scientific Authority to CITES, Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, 6 August 1997.

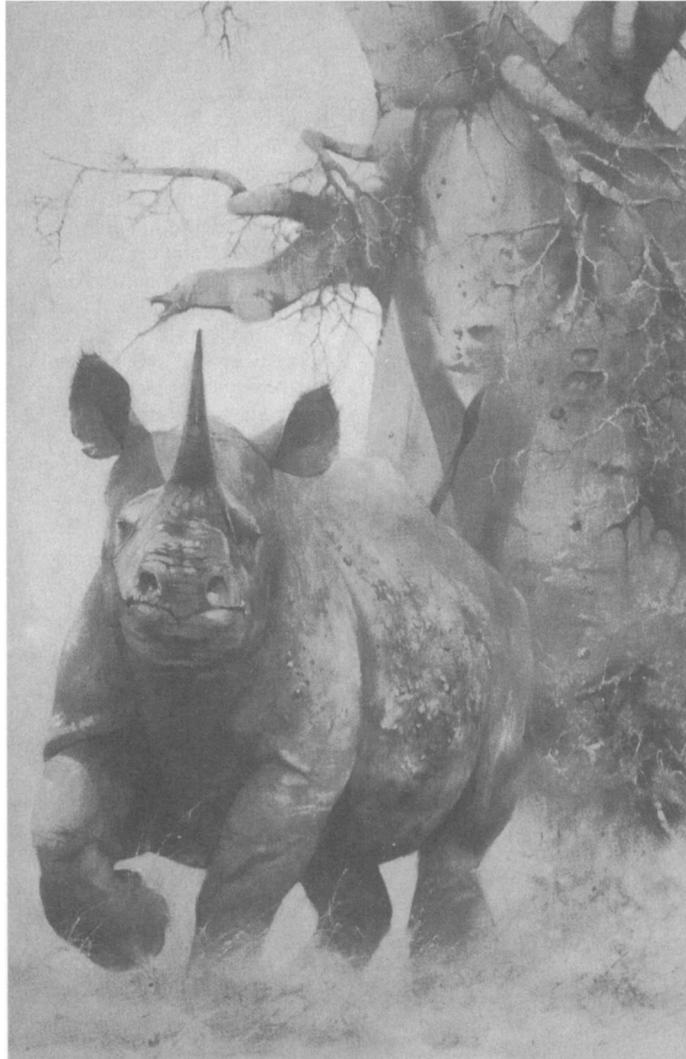
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Nigerian elephants decline

Elephant populations in Borno State, Nigeria – one of only a few states in Nigeria with an elephant population – have declined from an estimated 8060 in the 1970s to 200 today. The decline is attributed to habitat fragmentation, poaching and poor problem- animal control, accompanied by lack of political will and funding. The Environmental Protection Agency for Borno is finalizing an action plan for elephant conservation and is reviewing existing environmental laws.

Source: *Pachyderm*, No. 23, 1997.

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Painting of a Liwonde rhinoceros (by permission of the artist David Kelly).

Black rhinos breed in Malawi

A pair of black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis*, reintroduced into Liwonde National Park in October 1993, are now breeding. The rhinoceroses are housed in a 14-sq-km rhino sanctuary within the park, protected by electrified fences and guarded by game scouts. An agreement has been reached to procure two further female rhinoceroses from Mozambique

to increase genetic diversity in the sanctuary.

Source: Wildlife Society of Malawi, August 1997.

Aircraft prevents poaching

A purpose-built antipoaching light aircraft has undergone successful trials in Ghana's Mole National Park, which suffers from large-scale poaching for bushmeat. Since its arrival poaching incidents have decreased by an estimated

80 per cent. The specially modified plane patrols silently at a height of 6–46 m and at low speeds to allow observation. In 2 days it can survey an area that a foot patrol would cover in a week. More of these aircraft are to be built for possible use in parks in Tanzania and India.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, November 1997, 24–25.

Prawn project threatens mangrove

A major prawn-producing project plans to clear c. 6000 ha of mangrove at the Rufiji river delta in Tanzania. The plans, which include feed and fish meal plants, and a shrimp hatchery and processing facility, have been criticized by environmentalists and threaten the achievements of the 3-year-old NORAD-funded Mangrove Project.

Source: *Fish Farming International*, August 1997, 8.

Poaching increase since ivory trade resumed

Zambia has experienced an increase in poaching since the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species allowed the resumption of ivory trading with Japan in June 1997. In July and August 15 elephants were killed by poachers on the borders of Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and in the western provinces.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, October 1997, 23.

Peace parks

The inaugural meeting of the Peace Parks Foundation was held in South Africa in April 1997. Headed by Dr John Hanks, the new organization's mission is to raise funds for the development of seven Trans

Frontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) – also known as Peace Parks – along the borders of South Africa and its neighbours: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. The first, the Kalahari TFCA, which covers 42,059 sq km and incorporates Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa and Gemsbok National Park in Botswana, was implemented in September 1997 when bilateral agreements were signed between the two countries.

Sources: *Africa – Environment and Wildlife*, 1997, 5 (4), 31–39; *Endangered Wildlife*, 1997, 26, 39.

Fynbos conservation

The 'Fynbos Working for Water Program' in South Africa is proving beneficial to both the environment and human communities. Local people are being employed to clear invasive trees and shrubs from native fynbos vegetation on water catchment areas. The result – water and soil retention are being improved, levels of unemployment in rural communities have fallen dramatically and environmental awareness is being raised.

Source: *Aliens*, No. 5, 1997, 9.

Butterfly saved by NGO alliance

An alliance of NGOs stepped in to save the last remaining site of the Brenton blue butterfly *Orachrysops niobe* when the Western Cape conservation authority of South Africa failed to protect it from development. After campaigning, lobbying and a court case, the alliance achieved success when the South African Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism implemented Section 31A of the Environmental

Conservation Act, effectively preventing any development of the butterfly's habitat until further notice. Efforts are under way to buy the site so that it can be protected as a reserve.

Source: *Endangered Wildlife*, 1997, 26, 4–9.

Wild dogs reappear in northern Cape

African wild dogs *Lycaon pictus* have been recorded in the northern Cape region of South Africa for the first time in 60 years. Four individuals were seen in the Tswalu Private Desert Reserve and it is believed that they must have travelled about 350 km from either Botswana or Namibia.

Source: *Africa – Environment and Wildlife*, 1997, 5 (4), 90.

Lettuce threatens wetlands

Water lettuce *Pistia stratiotes*, which was introduced to the Seychelles as an ornamental plant some 5 years ago, has established in coastal marshes and is threatening native species. The largest freshwater marsh on La Digue has been destroyed by the plant, which spread from a few patches to complete coverage in 6 months in 1996. Native plants died and, of the fauna, only a few water beetles and snails survive. Invertebrates that bred in the marsh have experienced 90 per cent declines in adjacent woodlands, further threatening the Critically Endangered Seychelles paradise flycatcher *Terpsiphone corvina* and other insectivorous species. An endemic terrapin has been forced into small overcrowded streams or on to land, where it is being captured by humans or attacked by dogs and cats. There are plans to restore affected marshland.

Source: *Aliens*, No. 5, 1997, 12.

Owl rediscovered

The endemic Madagascar red owl *Tyto soumagnei*, believed to be extinct since the 1930s, was rediscovered by biologists collecting data on a species inventory mission in Zahamena Reserve during August 1996. *Source: Conservation International*, 4 August 1997.

New bird for Madagascar

Two museum specimens, collected in the 1940s, have led to the discovery of a new bird species for Madagascar – the red-shouldered vanga. The specimens, found in Toliara, south-west Madagascar, closely resembled the red-tailed vanga *Calicalicus madagascariensis*, a widespread endemic of Madagascar. Studies concluded that the specimens belong to a previously undescribed species, which has shorter wings, a longer tail and bill and different plumage details to the red-tailed vanga. The current status of the bird is uncertain but its forest habitat is under pressure for charcoal and timber. Fieldwork has confirmed its presence in south-east Toliara. *Source: World Birdwatch*, September 1997, 3.

Threat to pochard

The critically endangered Madagascar pochard *Aythya innotata*, at Lake Aloatra, is threatened by habitat degradation. Introduced plants, fish and mammals, farming and sedimentation have all contributed to the problem. *Source: World Birdwatch*, September 1997, 3.

Restoration success

Island restoration efforts in Mauritius have received a boost from the apparently

successful eradication in 1995 of common rat *Rattus norvegicus* from 67-ha Gunners Quoin, eastern house mice *Mus musculus* from 15-ha Cocos Island and 8-ha Sables Island, and ship rat *Rattus rattus* from 42-ha Gabriel Island.

Vegetation is recovering on Gunners Quoin and Gabriel Island, with *Latania* palms and *Pandanus* regenerating. On Gunners Quoin lizards have become more visible; the night gecko *Nactus coindemierensis* has been seen on at least two occasions – previously it had been seen only by the expedition that described it. *Source: Aliens*, No. 5, 1997, 8.

SOUTH & SOUTH EAST ASIA

Reef destroyed by illegal fishing

Illegal fishing is destroying the world's largest and most pristine coral atoll – Great Chagos Bank, a British territory situated in the Indian Ocean. A research expedition found that illegal fishing off the reef has had a devastating effect on sharks and large fish such as tuna and groupers. The Chagos archipelago has been used exclusively by the military since 1966 and the UK Government refuses to grant the area official protection, turning down requests to list it under the Ramsar Convention on wetlands, the UN's Biodiversity Treaty or as a World Heritage Site. Britain has licensed fishing off the territories since 1991, although fishing for sharks and any activity in reef lagoons is banned. A single fisheries patrol vessel, responsible for the entire area, is evaded by fishing boats from Sri Lanka,

which have been reported fishing off the atoll. The patrol vessel is too big to reach reef shallows where thousands of sharks are caught every year. At a conference in October 1997 to discuss the findings of the expedition the territory's commissioner promised new legal protection for Chagos. *Source: New Scientist*, 18 October 1997, 12.

Mangrove forest threatened

The reduced flow of freshwater and increased pollution in the Indus River, India, may be adversely affecting one of the world's largest mangrove forests. The low water flow has increased the salinity, killing mangrove species that are unable to tolerate high levels of salt. Four species have been wiped out and many are severely threatened. Untreated sewage and oil is dumped in the area, exacerbating the problem. The mangrove forests have also been depleted by local people who use the foliage as feed for camels and cattle.

Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin, September 1997, 684.

No protection for Pakistan

Pakistan's Environmental Protection Ordinance lapsed on 11 June 1997, leaving the country with no environmental protection laws. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency has become effectively defunct and the Pakistan National Environmental Quality Standards, formulated by IUCN and effective since 1996, will no longer have any basis in law. The government will now have to reintroduce the lapsed ordinance as a new act of law in parliament. *Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin*, July 1997, 499.



In April 1997 the Truong Son muntjac, a new species, was discovered in Truong Son Range, Vietnam, by a team from WWF, Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Danang University. The team did not see a live animal but obtained 18 skulls from hunters. The picture shows Pham Mong Giao, one of the survey team members, with one of the skulls (WWF/Tran Viet Duc).

Tiger trade flourishes in Bangladesh

Reports of tiger teeth and claws for sale in hotel shops have confirmed that the illegal trade in tiger parts is flourishing in Bangladesh. Only about 350 tigers remain in the Bangladesh Sundarbans.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, September 1997, 24.

Threatened deer discovered in Myanmar

A biological expedition to northern Myanmar, carried out by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Myanmar Forestry Department during 1997, has discovered a small, short-antlered deer, genetically identical to the Chinese black barking deer *Muntiacus crinifrons*, known only from an area in southeastern China,

over 1600 km away. The discovery could more than double the known population of the species, considered to be one of the most threatened deer in the world. The area has been largely unexplored and the Myanmar Minister of Forestry is currently in the process of designating Mount Hkakaborazi National Park, which at 2590 sq km will be one of the country's largest protected sites.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, October 1997, 12.

Government encourages sustainable timber

In an attempt to encourage a more sustainable timber harvest the Vietnamese Government has introduced new measures halting the export of all timber harvested from natural forests and banning the cutting of certain rare species. Efforts are also being made to encourage local people, communities and companies to grow trees for local use and export.

Source: *Tigerpaper Forest News*, July–September 1997, 8.

Giant ibis found in wetland

Dong Khathung, a wetland in south-western Laos between the Mekong River and the borders with Thailand and Cambodia, has been designated a National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NBCA). Its proximity to Khmer Rouge-held areas of north-western Cambodia had previously prevented ground surveys but in 1996 improved political stability led to three surveys by scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society, IUCN, the International Crane Foundation and the Lao Department of Forestry. Among their discoveries were two giant ibises *Thaumatibis*

gigantea, one of the world's rarest birds, which raised hopes that they might breed in the area. Greater adjutant storks *Leptoptilos dubius* were confirmed for the first time in Laos in 60 years and several other globally or regionally threatened species were seen. The area also contains Asian elephants *Elephas maximus*, banteng *Bos javanicus*, pileated gibbons *Hylobates pileatus* and tigers *Panthera tigris*. Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, October 1997, 9.

Oil spill in Singapore Straits

An oil spill, which threatens the coral reefs of the southern Singapore coast, followed the collision of two tankers in the Singapore Straits. About 25,000 tonnes of oil escaped and the spill has reached the mainland of Singapore and the beaches of three uninhabited islands in the Straits; Pulau Sedong, Pulau Senang and Pulau Pawai. There is additional concern over the widespread use of chemical dispersants, which allow the oil to enter the water column, increasing its ability to damage the reef ecosystem.

Source: WCMC, 18 October 1997.

Birdbox may save swiftlet

The survival prospects of the endangered swiftlets of South East Asia may be increased by the construction of artificial bird houses. The edible nests of the swiftlets are a Chinese delicacy and a reputed aphrodisiac that can command prices as high as £22,000 per kg, equivalent to 80–100 nests. Exports from Indonesia, the largest source, may be worth as much as £642 million per year and amount to 200 tonnes – a minimum of 16 million nests –

every year. A recent enterprise in east Java, where caves are rare, involves attracting swiftlets to artificial bird houses. Edible-nest swiftlets *Collocalia fuciphaga* are not naturally attracted to the boxes but the abundant glossy swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta* rapidly colonizes them. Eggs of the edible-nest birds are fostered under the glossy swiftlets and the nestlings later return as adult swiftlets to their place of hatching to nest. Nests from swiftlet houses are cleaner and more valuable than those from caves and it is hoped that production will shift away from caves and enable better regulation.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, November 1997, 27.

Reserve extended

The government of Indonesia has granted provisional approval of a 350,000-ha extension to the 2-million-ha Lorenz Strict Nature Reserve in Irian Jaya.

Source: *Arborvitae*, August 1997, 4.

Compulsory environmental audits for Indonesia

The Indonesian Government has drafted a bill that will ensure that companies carry out environmental assessments and will allow the government to take action against companies that refuse to comply. The bill will also increase punishment for companies found guilty of destroying the environment.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, August 1997, 598.

Indonesian parrot populations discovered

Fieldwork in Indonesia has uncovered new populations of two threatened parrot species –

the salmon-crested cockatoo *Cacatua moluccensis* and purple-naped lory *Lorius domicella*.

Both are endemic to the island of Seram in Maluku Province and the new populations were discovered in the north-east of the island.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, September 1997, 5.

Forestry project wins award

An industrial forest plantation initiative at Malaybalay, Bukidnon, in the Philippines, has won the international Monsanto Pledge Award. The project aims to turn denuded grassland into a sustainable forestry plantation model for the developing world. Created in 1989 this initiative is rehabilitating denuded *Imperata* grasslands while establishing an environmentally sound timber industry in the province. It has transformed more than 7000 ha of once-barren uplands into lush forests. When completed the project will cover at least 14,000 ha and produce 420,000 tonnes of timber annually, providing jobs for 4000 local people.

Source: *Tigerpaper Forest News*, July–September 1997, 10.

Illegal fishing at Nuajan

The 21,655-ha Nuajan Lake National Park on the north-eastern coast of Oriental Mindoro, the Philippines, is dominated by 8000 ha of lake waters, home to the endangered freshwater crocodile *Crocodylus mindorensis*. It is threatened by illegal fishing, aggravated by the use of destructive fishing gear and practices. Illegal settlers in the national park also contribute to resource exploitation.

Source: *Philippino Journal*, 17 April 1997.

EAST ASIA

Firefly reintroduction

The Department of Construction, Taiwan, is planning to reintroduce fireflies to six national parks and undertake habitat restoration work. Artificial light has greatly affected the mating behaviour of the firefly and this will be a major consideration of the project. The first reintroduction will take place in Yushan National Park.

Source: *Re-introduction News*, May 1997, 18.

Sea bird sanctuary extended

Cat Islet Seabird Sanctuary, Taiwan's first wildlife sanctuary, established in May 1991, is to be extended to include an additional 26 ha of sea area. The sanctuary encompasses about 10 ha, including the whole of Big and Little Cat Islets, and the extension will add a buffer zone of 100 m around both islands. The priority of the sanctuary is to protect seabirds and their breeding grounds and the only visitors allowed on the islands are those undertaking scientific research or nature education activities approved by the local government. Local fishermen will be allowed in the sanctuary only during the annual algae harvest (for the manufacture of agar-agar) and subject to stringent regulations.

Source: *International Conservation Newsletter*, June 1997, 6–7.

Crisis for wildlife

The first comprehensive review of the conservation status of Japanese mammals, commissioned by Japan's

Mammalogical Society and carried out by a network of zoologists, reports that the country's mammals are in crisis. The research ranked 154 species of terrestrial and marine mammals in seven categories, ordered by conservation status. Five species were listed as lost, including two species of wolf and two of bats, and 22 were listed as being on the verge of extinction, including the Amami rabbit *Pentalagus furnessi*. Of the 154 species, 85 were listed in the highest four categories of risk. Of these, 21 species are unique to Japan – many living on small island chains to the south of the Japanese archipelago – and so at risk of global extinction. Source: *New Scientist*, 15 November 1997, 27.

Illegal whale meat found

A significant proportion of whale meat eaten in Japan and South Korea comes from animals that have been killed illegally, according to Earthtrust, an organization based in Hawaii. The group tested DNA from 200 samples of whale meat on sale in restaurants and shops between 1993 and 1996, and found that more than half were from blue *Balaenoptera musculus*, fin *B. physalus*, Bryde's *B. edeni*, humpback *Megaptera novaeangliae*, and Baird's beaked whales *Berardius bairdii* and several species of dolphin. All are protected under international treaties. Japan and South Korea are only allowed to sell meat for domestic consumption from minke whales, provided they are killed as part of Japan's scientific whaling programme. Earthtrust claims that legally sold meat from the programme provides cover for the illegal trade. Source: *New Scientist*, 30 August 1997, 14.

NORTH AMERICA

Shark fishing ban

The US National Marine Fisheries Service has enforced sweeping restrictions to help halt the decline of Atlantic sharks. The restrictions ban all fishing of basking, whale, sand tiger, bigeye and white sharks in the southern Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. The rules have halved commercial shark fishing quotas and revoked 2300 shark permits. Despite the restrictions there is still concern that illegal shark fishing will continue. Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, October 1997, 15.

Flood control may damage endangered species

New legislation to help control flooding in the US may weaken the US Endangered Species Act, which currently protects many species from destruction of their habitats. A rider has been introduced to the Flood Supplemental Appropriations Bill that will exempt almost any activity associated with flood control from the regulations of the Endangered Species Act. Environmentalists are concerned that flood control activities take precedence over endangered species and their habitats but the bill is widely supported by the public. Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, June 1997, 365–367.

Pesticides may cause frog deformities

An outbreak of deformed frogs and other amphibians in North America and Canada, first observed 2 years ago, may be caused by breakdown products formed by the action of the sun's rays on pesticides.

Research at Oklahoma State University has shown that methoprene, which is sprayed on mosquito breeding pools to prevent larvae developing, has little effect on amphibian young in isolation but cismethoprenic acid and transmethoprenic acid, breakdown products formed on exposure to UV, cause developmental abnormalities that result in the malformation of adults. Other chemicals may behave in a similar manner and research at the US Geological Survey in Columbia has demonstrated that the common insecticide carbaryl also breaks down into a more toxic substance under UV. Scientists at McGill University in Montreal have found that frogs in ponds exposed to pesticides are much more likely to show deformities than those in ponds that are not. However, other evidence has suggested that the deformities may be caused by a parasitic fluke that burrows into tadpoles. Source: *New Scientist*, 13 September 1997, 18.

Wildflower trade reviewed

There is a substantial market for North American wildflowers, sold in the USA for use in gardens, nutritional and medicinal products. Many flowers are gathered from the wild and there are no controls over collection. TRAFFIC USA is documenting the trade to determine if any species need conservation and regulatory attention. They have been petitioning retailers to label plants as 'wild collected' or 'nursery propagated', and conducted a review of native wild flowers sold by mail-order that found many plants inappropriately labeled. Source: *TRAFFIC USA*, August 1997, 13.

Beetles control weed

Purple loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria*, an invasive plant, introduced into North America from Europe 200 years ago, might be controlled by four species of European loosestrife-eating beetles. Experimental releases of the insects at 500 sites in the USA have successfully reduced populations of the plant – in one 5000-sq-m site in southern Ontario the plant has decreased to 5 per cent of its previous abundance. The plant is widespread in North America and Canada and threatens the survival of native sedges, bulrushes and other plants vital to wetland animals and birds. Further beetle releases are planned. *Source: New Scientist*, 9 August 1997, 20.

Grizzly bear reintroduction debated

Plans by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to reintroduce grizzly bears *Ursus arctos* into 15,500 sq km of wilderness in central Idaho and western Montana have been opposed by ranchers who fear that the bears may threaten livestock. The area is also popular for recreation and there is concern that the bears may pose a threat to humans. *Source: CNN*, 10 September 1997.

Jet skis disturb loon

The common loon *Gavia immer*, in several US states, faces new problems caused by jet skis. A growing number of incidents of watercraft chasing or hitting the birds has been recorded and the harassment may be having an impact on population numbers. The National Park Service has formed a group to determine whether new boating regulations are

necessary for all 360 national parks and recreation areas. *Source: Audubon*, September–October 1997, 14.

Great plains altered

Several species are declining as a result of changes in land-use patterns across the Great Plains of North America. The decline of the black-footed ferret *Mustela nigripes* is well documented, but other species affected include the swift fox *Vulpes velox*, mountain plover *Charadrius montanus* and lesser prairie-chicken *Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*. Biologists are also concerned about several grassland nesting birds. The Fish and Wildlife Service is co-operating in an initiative called the 'High Plains Partnership for Species at Risk' that will work to solve the problems of declining wildlife before the situation becomes critical. The project will focus on the lesser prairie-chicken and species sharing its habitat.

Source: Endangered Species Bulletin, July/August 1997, 9.

Island biosphere reserve

The US Nature Conservancy has acquired 14 Atlantic barrier islands off the Virginia eastern coast to incorporate into the Virginia Coast Biosphere Reserve. Habitat enhancement and community planning for future development are part of the Virginia Eastern Shore Sustainable Development Corporation's plans to create jobs for local people and protect the environment, while earning profits for its investors. *Source: US MAB Bulletin*, July 1997, 7.

Swans learn migration path

An ultralight aircraft will be used as a surrogate parent to

teach 10 young trumpeter swans *Cygnus buccinator* to fly from the Virginia shore of Chesapeake to a Maryland farm 160 km to the north. In subsequent years the swans will be taught to fly as far as Canada in an attempt to re-establish migration routes that were lost after the swans were almost wiped out earlier this century. In the 1930s the swans numbered only 69 birds in continental USA and, although numbers have recovered to about 2800 in the Rocky Mountains and 800 in the Midwest, in most parts of the country they were wiped out completely. Previous attempts at reintroduction from captivity have been only partially successful. The technique has been successful in teaching Canada geese *Branta canadensis* but has not yet been used to re-establish a population of birds. *Source: New Scientist*, 19 July 1997, 15.

Sunflower at risk

During May 1997 the US Fish and Wildlife Service added Eggert's sunflower *Helianthus eggertii* to the US list of Threatened and Endangered Species. This perennial, which grows up to 2.5 m high and produces large yellow flowers, is found at sites in Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky. In some areas the plant's open, barren habitat is being developed for farming and other uses while other areas are undergoing vegetation succession, which shades or crowds out the plants. *Source: Endangered Species Bulletin*, July/August 1997, 27.

Pelican success

The California brown pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis californicus* population has made a

significant recovery in the 30 years since it was almost wiped out by DDT contamination. The pesticide was banned in 1972 and a year later a recovery plan was put into action. In 1997 an estimated 3000 chicks were expected to fledge from 4000 breeding pairs on West Anacapa Island in Channel Islands National Park. Some scientists suggest that the bird could be a candidate for downlisting to threatened status or even removal from the endangered-species list. There is concern that DDT-contaminated sediment remains, which affects anchovies, the pelican's main food source. The bird's eggs are still thinner than normal, a symptom of DDT contamination, suggesting a low-level chronic problem. *Source: Audubon*, September–October 1997, 18.

Plans to save mystery fish

Scientists are fighting to save the robust redborse *Ptychostomus robustus*, a fish that was lost to science for over 100 years. First recorded in Yadkin River in North Carolina, USA, in 1870, the species was already declining and later became confused with a related species. In the 1980s two specimens of an 'unknown fish' were discovered in the Pee Dee River of North Carolina and Georgia's Savannah River. Further fish were found in Georgia's Oconee River in 1991 and after much research they were all identified as the true *P. robustus*. Fish experts are working to save the species. *Source: Wildlife Conservation*, October 1997, 21.

Refuge approved

A proposal to protect areas of undeveloped wetlands on the coast of South Carolina, USA,

has been approved by the US Department of the Interior. The proposed Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge designates about 8200 ha as potential refuge lands. The Fish and Wildlife Service will now identify owners and willing sellers, and solicit funds to purchase land, acquiring it gradually in small fragments. The wetlands already receive protection under the Clean Water Act but the area is not safe from all forms of development. Environmentalists are concerned about preserving hardwood forest that provides stopover sites for migratory birds. Several resident endangered and threatened species (including the bald eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla leucocephalus* and the wood stork *Mycteria americana*) also rely on the area. *Source: Audubon*, September–October 1997, 109–110.

Stinking cedar reintroduction

Habitat change and a fungal pathogen have reduced the population of stinking cedar *Torreya taxifolia* to 1500 non-fruiting trees, restricted to a 20-km stretch of the Florida–Georgia border in the USA. In April 1997 conservationists planted 19 healthy trees, propagated at Atlanta Botanic Garden, on land belonging to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in White County, north of Georgia – some distance from the species's natural distribution to avoid reinfection by the pathogen – as part of a project to reintroduce viable plants into the wild. Several of the trees have produced fertile cones and it is hoped that this will lead to the eventual reintroduction of the species to native habitat. *Source: Plant Talk*, July 1997, 17.

Conservation agreement for lizard

Irrigation for agriculture, urban development, military training operations, road construction and off-road vehicle use have severely degraded the habitat of the flat-tailed horned lizard *Phrynosoma mcallii*, which ranges from southern Arizona and California to north-western Mexico. Recent estimates suggest that 48.6 per cent of the species's historical range in the US is now unusable as habitat for the species, as much as 95 per cent of remaining optimal habitat for this species in California is threatened and areas along the US–Mexico border are under pressure from development originating from the North American Free Trade Agreement. A coalition of environmental groups has taken legal action against the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for failing to act on its proposal to list the species as threatened. The FWS has proposed a 'conservation agreement' that would serve in place of federal listing but environmentalists are concerned that this will not afford sufficient protection to remaining habitat. *Source: Wildlife Conservation*, October 1997, 19.

Jaguar endangered in USA

Jaguars *Panthera onca*, already listed as endangered from Mexico to Argentina, have been listed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered in the USA. The listing follows a court ruling that gave the Service until 17 July to place the species on the endangered list. Protecting habitat in the US for jaguars was deemed unnecessary because there is no habitat area in the USA critical to the animal's survival. However, several sightings



Flat-tailed horned lizard near Yuma, Arizona (Dale S. Turner).

were made of jaguars in Arizona during 1996.
Source: Audubon, September–October 1997, 88.

Manatee virus discovered

A papillomavirus has been discovered in two gulf-coast manatees *Trichechus manatus latirostris*, the first viral infection ever detected in this species. It causes cauliflower-shaped warts on the animals and is related to the virus that causes planar warts on human feet. It may be a new, emerging infection or could be symptomatic of the weakening of the manatees' immune systems caused by pollution.
Source: New Scientist, 16 August 1997, 21.

Nightshade invades Florida

Wetland nightshade, or aquatic soda apple, *Solanum tampicense* – a native of Central America and the Caribbean – is causing concern among conservationists in Florida. It was first recorded on the state's mainland in 1983 and has since been found in only four other sites, but its dominance and rapid rates of

dispersal within these sites are arousing concern for protected areas. There are critical wetland reserves within 50 km and the Everglades National Park is only 80 km away.
Source: Aliens, No. 5, 1997, 10–11.

Coral reserve in Mexico

The Cabo Pulmo coral reef in the Gulf of California became the only officially protected coral reef on the continental Pacific coast of Mexico when it was declared a marine national park by the Mexican Government in June 1995. The park covers 7111 ha, of which 450 ha are coral reef. The reef is popular with divers and sport fisherman, and a number of coral colonies have been broken or killed by anchors or inexperienced divers. A management plan is being developed to address the threats.
Source: Conservation Biology, August 1997, 11 (4), 838.

Midway Atoll protected

The management of Midway Atoll, three remote islands situated 2011 km west-northwest of Honolulu, will be

handed to the protection of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as a wildlife refuge. Formerly under the control of the US military, the islands have been closed to all but a few scientists and a small Navy contingent since the Second World War. The naval field has now closed and the FWS, which has run a refuge on the islands since 1988, will now take full responsibility for running the Atoll. Plans are being considered to use ecotourism to support wildlife conservation on the islands and tourists are already visiting the island as part of a trial collaboration with Midway Phoenix Corporation, a company that has been helping to manage and service the islands. The Atoll is encircled by a coral reef and hosts vast flocks of seabirds and an abundant marine life.
Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin, June 1997, 366.

CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

Guatemalan rain forest protected

The Cerro San Gill area of Guatemala was declared a National Protected Area in November 1996. The reserve contains the largest fragment of very humid-tropical forest in Guatemala, which comprises 21,000 ha of the 48,000-ha park.
Source: Plant Talk, July 1997, 17.

Scarlet macaws discovered

A group of at least 60 scarlet macaws *Ara macao* have been located by scientists, near the small Mayan village of Red Bank, near the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary in southern Belize. This is the

largest known gathering of these birds in the country, possibly in all Central America. Evidence was found that the birds are shot for food and captured for sale as pets, and habitat destruction also threatens the species. Work is under way to increase local people's awareness of the bird and encourage them to protect them in the hope that they will attract birdwatching tourists. *Source: Wildlife Conservation, August 1997, 10.*

Iguana release

Six Jamaican iguanas *Cyclura collei* were released in Jamaica in June 1997 and another six released in the autumn as part of a project to restore the population in its native habitat. The iguanas, fitted with radio transmitters to monitor their movements, were released at known nesting sites in the Hellshire Hills. The project, funded through the Zoological Society of San Diego and the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, also involves nest-site protection, collection of hatchlings, monitoring of wild iguanas and predator control. *Source: Wildlife Conservation, October 1997, 20.*

SOUTH AMERICA

Large-scale logging rejected

The President of Suriname has announced plans to reject large-scale timber concessions in the country's interior. The president's decree limits all concessions to 150,000 ha and places a moratorium on pending concessions until completion of a study to develop a nationwide sustainable forestry strategy.

The announcement follows a 2-year campaign by conservationists to draw attention to shortcomings in large-scale logging contracts and encourage alternatives. *Source: Conservation International, 21 August 1997.*

No sale for national park

An experimental plan to auction logging rights in the Tapajos National Park in the state of Para, Brazil, has been suspended after an injunction was issued against the project. The government's environmental agency, IBAMA, had been due to open bids from private logging companies on 8 September 1997. A 1000-ha area of Amazonian rain forest was to be sold to logging companies to manage and extract timber under strict criteria laid down by IBAMA. The legal action was brought by public prosecutors who cited alleged irregularities in the plan. *Source: CNN World News, 11 September 1997.*

New reserve forms world's largest corridor

The government of the State of Amazonas in Brazil announced the creation of a new protected area in the Amazon on 27 October 1997. The park is part of the Pilot Programme for the Protection of the Rainforest, a project funded by the G7 nations, that aims to protect Brazilian rain forest by creating a series of protected-area corridors linking key biodiversity areas of the country. The Amaná Reserve, will be the largest protected area of tropical rain forest in South America, covering 2,350,000 ha in the central Amazon basin, between the Negro and Japurá Rivers, major tributaries of the Amazon. The

new reserve will join the Mamirauá Flooded Forest Reserve and the Jaú National Park, resulting in a combined protected area of 5,766,000 ha – the largest protected area in the world. A new legal category – the Sustainable Development Reserve – will be used to manage the protected area, permitting the residence of local people in the reserve and encouraging local participation in its protection. *Source: Sociedade Civil Mamiraua, 27 October 1997.*

Another park for Brazil

A new park has been created in Bahia, Brazil, which will double the area of protected forest in the region. The Serra do Conduru State Park will protect 7000 ha of forest adjacent to a road through the coastal Atlantic forest that is currently being developed in the hope of boosting regional tourism. *Source: Conservation International, 10 August 1997.*

Antwren rediscovered

The Rio de Janeiro antwren *Myrmotherula fluminensis* has been rediscovered in south-east Brazil by two British ornithologists in the Serra dos Óragás foothills, 60 km north-east of Rio de Janeiro. The only previous record was a male collected in 1982. The area harbours several other threatened birds including the elegant mourner *Laniisoma elegans*, and the kinglet calyptura *Calyptura cristata* was recently rediscovered here. *Source: World Birdwatch, September 1997, 3.*

New hope for macaw

The last Spix's macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* in the wild has mated with a female blue-

winged macaw, which may have produced fertile eggs; an embryo has been discovered in one of the eggs. By introducing pure Spix's macaw eggs from captive-bred birds into the wild birds' nest it is hoped that they will rear the young as their own. It is possible that the breeding potential of this pair may lead to the recovery of the species, the most endangered in the world. A previous attempt to achieve wild breeding of Spix's macaws through the release of a captive female failed.
 Source: *BBC Wildlife*, September 1997, 17.

Forests threatened

A Japanese mining company, Bishimetal Exploration, has been prospecting for copper and other metals in the wet rain forest of north-west Ecuador and has proposed building a mine in the buffer zone of the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve – 2040 sq km of coastal forest, montane cloud forest and páramo. A full environmental impact study has not been carried out and logging has begun. Local people are against the plan and a local NGO, Defensa y Conservacion Ecologica de Intag, has been organizing the opposition. A second area of north-west Ecuadorian forest in the Mache Mountains may be under threat from commercial loggers. Ecuadorian NGO Fundación Jatun Sachas hopes to protect some of the area by buying stands of forest. It has already purchased 2500 ha of the 70,000 ha forest.
 Source: *Plant Talk*, October 1997, 13.

Park doubled

The Noel Kempff National Park in north-east Bolivia is to be doubled in size to 8900 sq km,

making it the largest area protected through private initiative. The park contains globally threatened birds such as the rufous-sided pygmy tyrant *Euscarthmus rufomarginatus* and black-and-tawny seedeater *Sporophila nigrorufa*.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, September 1997, 5.

Crake found in Bolivia

The rufous-faced crake *Laterallus xenopterus*, a threatened species known previously from only six sites in eastern Paraguay and one in central Brazil, has been recorded in Beni Biological Station Reserve, lowland Bolivia.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, September 1997, 4.

Argentina's mollusc invaders

The shipping trade from South East Asia is believed to have been responsible for the spread of three species of alien bivalve molluscs *Corbicula fluminea*, *C. largillierii* and *Limnoperna fortunei* into the rivers of the La Plata basin, Argentina. The two *Corbicula* species were probably introduced between 1965 and 1975, while *L. fortunei* was found in Argentina for the first time in 1991. Evidence is building that they are competing with native bivalves, which are already threatened by habitat alteration, and there are fears that extinctions will occur.
 Source: *Aliens*, No. 5, 1997, 3–4.

Fishing limits for sea bass

New fishing limits are to be set for the Chilean sea bass – a deep-water species, also known as the Patagonian toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides* – at a meeting of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources in Tasmania. The species has

declined dramatically since heavy fishing began in southern Chile in 1989. Stocks crashed there in 1992 causing the boats to move to Argentinian waters, depleting these stocks then moving again to South African waters. Some countries recommend that legal limits on the toothfish are increased, so that the number of legal boats is greater, making it more difficult for illegal boats to fish unnoticed. Most of the damage is caused by the illegal catch, which far exceeds the legal limit.
 Source: *New Scientist*, 8 November 1997, 12.

PACIFIC

Local people to monitor frogs

A training programme for local people, developed by David Bickford at the University of Miami, is to be used in an effort to monitor the virtually unknown frog populations of Papua New Guinea. The programme is based on standard methods that will be used by local people on a long-term basis. Trained local observers will sample frog assemblages using a specially modified visual encounter survey and quadrat method.
 Source: *Froglog*, August 1997, 2.

Log ban lifted despite new forest policy

The Vanuatu Department of Forests has completed a National Forest Policy, including an extensive consultation process with landowners, logging companies, provincial governments, NGOs and other interested organizations and individuals. The policy has been submitted to the country's

Council of Ministers for official adoption. However, at the same time, Vanuatu's Council of Ministers has repealed a ban on the export of unprocessed logs from this South Pacific island. The ban has been in place since July 1994 and was approved as an act in parliament. The repeal allows a limited export of up to 180,000 cu m during a trial period, up to the end of 1997. The legality of these actions was questioned by many groups, but they have been established as an act of parliament. The decision has been criticized as ignoring the draft National Forestry Policy and for setting export levels at nearly three times the calculated sustainable annual harvest of 66,000 cu m. *Source: Tigerpaper Forest News, July–September 1997.*

AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND/ANTARCTICA

Tuna at all time low

Numbers of mature southern bluefin tuna *Thunnus maccoyii* in the Southern Oceans are believed to be at their lowest ever for this species and stocks may be at risk of commercial extinction if fishing levels are maintained. A report from TRAFFIC Oceania documents the decline of this fish, which is highly valued for the luxury Japanese sashimi trade. It recommends that the total annual catch, currently at 11,750 tonnes, be reduced by 35 per cent to help ensure recovery by 2020. Australia, New Zealand and Japan, the major fishing nations, are members of the Commission of the Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna but as yet they have failed to develop a joint management plan for the

fishery. Non-member countries such as Taiwan, Indonesia and South Korea, are also a threat and the co-operation of all nations involved in the trade and strong international catch restraint are essential to rebuild the fishery to safe and sustainable levels. *Source: TRAFFIC Oceania, 30 July 1997.*

Alien fish outnumber natives

A 2-year study has found that the introduced European carp now outnumbers native fish in the rivers of New South Wales, Australia. Scientists found that dams and irrigation projects have altered river dynamics resulting in conditions that favour the carp. Although c. 55,000 fish were sampled, 16 native species were not detected. *Source: New Scientist, 27 September 1997, 21.*

Koalas evacuated

Koalas *Phascolarctos cinereus* on Australia's Kangaroo Island have exhausted the island's supply of eucalyptus trees. It is hoped that a plan to airlift 800 of the island's 5000 koalas during November 1997 has relieved some of the pressure on the food supply. Koalas were introduced to Kangaroo Island in the 1920s in an attempt to protect the species. *Source: BBC Wildlife, November 1997, 26.*

Snapper decision overturned

The New Zealand Court of Appeal has overturned a ruling made earlier this year to cut the north-eastern commercial snapper catch (*Oryx* 31 (4), 241), basing its decision on a technical deficiency by the minister to observe a now-repealed provision of the old

Fisheries Act. Conservationists say that snapper stocks have been in decline since the early 1980s in this fishery, which runs from North Cape to the Bay of Plenty, and current catch levels need to be reduced. *Source: Forest & Bird Conservation News, August 1997, 5.*

Desert park opens

A new 'biopark' will protect wildlife and educate people about the landscapes, animals and plants of Australia's deserts and their traditional use and management by the indigenous Aboriginal people. The Alice Springs Desert Park opened in March 1997 and protects 1300 ha of desert. It includes a river, woodland and sand dunes, and provides habitat for 400 animal and 350 plant species. *Source: Wildlife Conservation, October 1997, 16.*

Calcirovirus problem

The illegal introduction of the rabbit calcivirus in New Zealand may have an adverse effect on the black stilt *Himantopus novaeseelandiae*, one of the world's rarest wading birds. Ferrets, stoats and feral cats, the rabbits' main predators, may eat the birds' eggs if rabbit populations are killed off. The government has ordered its conservation officers on South Island to increase trapping of ferrets and stoats at 15 sites south-east of Mount Cook, the birds' main breeding area. *Source: New Scientist, 13 September 1997, 5.*

Call to reduce bycatch

The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand has called on

government ministers to ban tuna fisheries from longline fishing off the east coast and southern New Zealand. It is hoped that this will reduce the bird and marine mammal bycatch, restricting it to waters off the west coast where bycatch is low. A report of observed vessels in 1997 counted 112 dead albatrosses and petrels, two dolphins and 41 fur seals. Two endangered northern royal albatrosses *Diomedea epomophora* were among the birds killed. Source: *Forest and Bird Conservation News*, July 1997, 2.

Fishing banned in reserve

By October 1998 all fishing will cease at the Poor Knights Islands Marine Reserve – the only marine reserve in New Zealand to allow recreational fishing. Warm subtropical currents around the islands, off the Northland coast, support a wide variety of marine life. It is a world-renowned diving area with caves, archways, steep walls and other marine habitats. Fishing has been permitted in 95 per cent of the reserve and levels have increased, which has prevented marine life from flourishing. Surveys show little improvement in fish stocks since the area was designated a reserve and the golden snapper has practically disappeared. Although the fishing dispensation formally ended in 1994 and was not renewed, legal action by fishermen delayed the process. Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation News*, July 1997, 1.

Disruption to food chains

Krill populations may be suffering from the effects of ozone depletion, global warming and over-fishing, causing major disruptions in

Antarctic food chains. The thinning of the ozone layer over Antarctica has led to increased exposure to UVB, further exacerbated by a reduction in ice cover due to global warming, which has caused a decline in phytoplankton on which krill feed and may also kill krill larvae directly. The harvest of krill for chicken and animal feed could add to the problems. Krill declines could adversely affect whales, penguins and seals. Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, August 1997, 597.

Antarctic birds polluted

Pollution, originating from industrial plants thousands of kilometres away, is affecting Antarctic sea birds. Nico van den Brink of the Institute for Forestry and Nature Research in Wageningen, the Netherlands, took samples of the oil produced for preening from five Antarctic species – Adélie penguin *Pygoscelis adeliae*, southern fulmar *Fulmarus glacialisoides*, snow petrel *Pagodroma nivea*, Antarctic petrel *Thalassoica antarctica* and pintado petrel *Daption capense* – to determine the content of volatile organic chemicals. Levels of hexachlorobenzene (HCB), which can interfere with birds' circulation, were found to be hundred of times higher than the levels found in oil from common terns living on the Dutch Waddenzee. Source: *New Scientist*, 31 May 1997, 7.

PEOPLE

New director for US Fish and Wildlife Service

Jamie Rappaport Clark has been appointed Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

She has been the Service's Assistant Director for Ecological Services since 1994, during which time she was responsible for programmes on endangered species, habitat restoration, wetlands and contaminants.

Paulo Nogueira Neto,

Professor of Zoology at the University of São Paulo, was the 1997 recipient of WWF's premier award – The Duke of Edinburgh Conservation Medal (formerly the WWF Conservation Medal). The award was made in recognition of his contribution to conservation in Brazil over 40 years. He was formerly the first Secretary of the Environment for Brazil and set up the country's network of ecological stations.

PUBLICATIONS

African Rhinos

The first edition of the newsletter of the IUCN/SSC African Rhino Specialist Group was published in April 1997.

Alien Invasive Species

Conserving Vitality and Diversity. Proceedings of the World Conservation Congress Workshop on Alien Invasive Species (ISBN: 0 662 25402 3, pp. 96) summarizes the discussions of the workshop on alien invasive species held in Montreal, Canada, during the World Conservation Congress, 13–23 October 1996. Copies of this report, compiled by Clayton D. A. Rubec and Gerry O. Lee, are available from the Habitat Conservation Division, Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0H3.

Habitats for Birds in Europe: A Conservation Strategy for the Wide Environment

(ISBN: 0 946888 32 9, pp. 464)
This is the sixth book in BirdLife International's BirdLife Conservation Series. It can be ordered from NHBS, 2-3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon TQ9 5XN, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1803 865 913; Fax: +44 (0)1803 865 280.

Tropical forest management and biodiversity

Studies of the Effects of Tropical Forest Management on Biodiversity: A Summary Bibliography has been compiled by Andrew Greiser Johns as a reference for people working in this area. It is available free of charge from FRR Ltd, The Bell Tower, 12 High Street, Northamptonshire NN13 7DT, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1280 705700; Fax: +44 (0)1280 706700; E-mail: fr@fr.co.uk.

Cactus and Succulent Plants – Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan

(ISBN: 2 8317 0390 5, pp. 212)
Compiled by the Sara Oldfield, Secretary of the IUCN/SSC Cactus and Succulent Specialist Group, this action plan is available from IUCN Publications Services Unit, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 0DL, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1223 277894; Fax: +44 (0)1223 277175; E-mail: iucn-psu@wcmc.org.uk.

The African Wild Dog – Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan, by Rosie

Woodroffe, Joshua R. Ginsberg and David W. Macdonald, is available through the IUCN Publications Service Unit, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, UK. Fax: +44 (0)1223 277175; E-mail: iucn-psu@wcmc.org.uk.

MEETINGS

International Conference on Medicinal Plants. 16–20

February 1998, Bangalore, India. *Contact:* FRLHT, No. 50, 2nd Stage, MSH Layout, Anandnagar, Bangalore 650024, India. Tel: +91 80 333 6909 /0348; Fax: +91 80 333 4167; E-mail: root@frlht.ernet.in.

17th Session of the Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission.

23–27 February 1998, Indonesia. *Contact:* Patrick Durst, Regional Forestry Officer, FAO/RAP, 39 Phra Atit Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand. Tel: 66 2 281 7844; Fax: 66 2 280 0445; E-mail: patrick.durst@field.fao.org.

The 2nd Planta Europa Conference.

9–13 June 1998, Uppsala, 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 18 67 34 80; E-mail: plantaeuropa98@dha.slu.se.

21st Annual Meeting of the American Society of Primatologists.

28 June–1 July 1998, Texas, USA. *Contact:* Steven Schapiro, University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Department of Veterinary Research, Tre 2, Box 151-B1, Bastrop, Texas 78602, USA. Tel: 512 321 3991; Fax: 512 322 5208.

Crocodilian Biology and Evolution.

8–10 July 1998, Brisbane, Australia. *Contact:* Crocodile Conference, Department of Zoology, University of Queensland, Brisbane QLD 4072, Australia. Tel: +61 7 3365 2471; Fax: +61 7 3365 1655; E-mail: crocodile@zoology.uq.edu.au; Web site:

<http://www.zoology.uq.edu.au/conference.html>.

VII International Congress of Ecology, New Tasks for Ecologists after Rio 92.

19–25 July 1998, Florence, Italy. *Contact:* Almo Farina, Vice-President INTECOL, Secretariat VII International Congress of Ecology, Lunigiana Museum of Natural History, Fortezza della Brunella, 54011 Aulla, Italy. Tel: +39 187 400252; Fax: +39 187 420727; E-mail: afarina@tamnet.it; Web site: <http://www.tamnet.it/intecol.98>.

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 Compostela, 15706 Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Fax: (34) 81 593316; E-mail: galemys@pinar1.csic.es.

XVII Congress of the International Primatological Society.

9–14 August 1998, Antananarivo, Madagascar. *Contact:* Secretariat XVII IPS Congress, Madame Berthe Rakotosamimanana, Faculte des Sciences, Batement P, Porte 207, BP 906, Antananarivo 101, Madagascar. Tel: 261 (03) 80570; E-mail: ralaiari@syfed.refer.mg.

The 5th Botanic Gardens Conservation Congress.

14–18 September 1998, Cape Town, South Africa. *Contact:* Professor Brian J. Huntley, National Botanical Institute, Private Bag X7, Claremont 7735, South Africa. Tel: +27 21 762 1166; Fax: +27 21 761 4687; E-mail: bgci98@nbict.nbi.ac.za.

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