

In this issue

The Fauna and Flora Preservation Society is international in its scope and membership and aims to make its journal reflect that fact. We publish articles and news from as many parts of the world as possible and continually seek ways to improve the journal's coverage – but there is only so much that a lone editor can do. Recent discussions with Blackwell Science, our publisher, resulted in a decision to appoint a deputy editor to provide a North American perspective. This was considered particularly appropriate because, after the UK, North America provides the FFPS with the largest proportion of its members and the highest number of subscribers to *Oryx*.

Blackwell Science helped us find an ideal candidate for this role and in this issue we welcome Gary Meffe, who has generously agreed to contribute a regular column under the title Savannah Perspective. Gary is an Associate Professor at the University of Georgia and the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory with research interests in aquatic ecology, evolutionary ecology, fish biology and conservation biology. He has been a member of the editorial board of *Conservation Biology*, which is published by Blackwell Science in the USA, since the inception of that journal and has two books to his credit. The most recent, *Principles of Conservation Biology*, which he co-authored with C. R. Carroll (1994, Sinauer Associates) is being used as a text in undergraduate and postgraduate courses across the USA.

A sense of great loss accompanied the news of the death of Gerald Durrell in January. He was a valued Vice-President of the FFPS, inspired an entire generation of naturalists and did so much for conservation. An obituary appears on pages 70–71.

The sustainable use of wildlife theme continues in this issue with an article on the sustainable use debate, written by Catherine Allen and Stephen Edwards of the IUCN Sustainable Use of Wildlife Programme in Washington, USA. The unique co-operative centre, which has harnessed the traditional skills of the Irula people in India to produce snake venom for

use in the manufacture of antivenom serum, features in an article by Romulus Whitaker, who set up the centre in 1978, and Harry Andrews. The centre appears to be an excellent example of long-term sustainable use of wildlife, although more research is needed before that claim can be made with certainty.

Examples of unsustainable use are unfortunately far easier to find. 'Fisheries in the Galápagos' describes how the exploitation of marine resources has become wildly out of control – if unchecked the long-term effects will be disastrous for both the fishermen and the marine life of the Galápagos. New regulations offer hope for the future but problems of enforcement remain and the fishermen themselves will need to make radical changes.

While modern conservation philosophy emphasizes that people's needs must be taken into account when designing conservation programmes, it is often difficult to reconcile the conflicting needs of people and wildlife. John Oates describes one case where the status of an important wildlife refuge in Nigeria has been compromised by a programme of agricultural development assistance. It is hoped that publishing case studies such as this will help to point the way to constructive solutions to these problems. The learning curve will have to be a steep one if conservation through development efforts are to work.

More traditional contributions to *Oryx* include two papers on wildlife surveys carried out in 1994, both in areas that have been inaccessible to scientific work for many years because of political upheavals. George Schaller and Alan Rabinowitz describe the survey that led to the discovery that the saola, or spindle-horn antelope, *Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*, which was discovered in Vietnam in 1992, also exists in Laos. The same authors, with U Uga, describe a survey of one of the most important remaining sites for wildlife in Myanmar. Papers on the restoration of houbara bustard populations in Saudi Arabia and on the status and conservation needs of the Ouvéa parakeet, which belongs to a genus that is endemic to New Caledonia in the south-west Pacific, complete the issue.

Jacqui Morris, Editor

FFPS reaches out to Russia

During the past two years there have been several references in *Oryx* to serious declines in some populations of endangered species in the countries of the former USSR. The causes have been given wide publicity: loss of reserve personnel; the temptation for authorities short of funds to sell unrestricted licences to foreign hunters for dollars; weak border controls in some places allowing illegal animal parts – tiger bones and saiga horn for example – to be smuggled out easily to markets in eastern Asia. The growing stratification of society is also having a marked effect: illegal hunting and the trade in animal parts and products is fed by new entrepreneurs seeking ways to gain more dollars and by poverty-stricken people seeking means of survival.

Apart from the dramatic issues of illegal hunting and trade, conservation efforts generally are suffering from a lack of funds and teams of biologists who co-operated on USSR-wide programmes have lost contact. The Theriological Society of the Russian (formerly USSR) Academy of Sciences sought to address this last problem by organizing a conference, its first since 1992, to reunite some of its 3500 members spread across the former USSR. The shortage of funds and transport problems made it difficult to turn this into reality.

When the Theriological Society, whose President is one of FFPS's Vice-Presidents, approached us with a request for financial assistance to make the conference possible, we agreed. The objectives of the conference were: to restore and establish new scientific contacts between zoologists in the countries of the former USSR; to raise public awareness of the threatened status of several mammals in these countries; to identify areas where research, monitoring and conservation efforts are needed and how these can be co-ordinated internationally. Charity Know How provided a grant and the IUCN European Programme also gave financial assistance.

Representing the FFPS at the conference in February in Moscow, I was heartened to see how successful it was in meeting its objectives. The papers reflected the urgency of the prob-

lems and among the 300 or so participants were some 75 scientists from outside Russia. Workshops were held on the polar bear, saiga antelope and European bison and IUCN's threatened species categories. A future issue of *Oryx* will present the major findings.

The conference confirmed the problems but also lifted the spirits. There are so many committed biologists working in difficult conditions and with limited resources. I was pleased to be able to visit the Biology Faculty of Moscow State University's field station at Tchernogolovka after the conference was over, a visit that was arranged as a gesture of thanks to the FFPS. I spent a fascinating afternoon among the large enclosures, catching glimpses of musk deer through the trees and learning about the work going on there from scientists working with a wide range of species. As darkness fell we retreated to one of the buildings that served as joint workplace and residence, stamped the snow off our boots and enjoyed vodka and a festive meal. The toast I shall remember most was (loosely translated from the Russian) 'To the animals who we love so much – may they outlive us.'

It goes without saying that many of the biologists I spoke to cannot afford to join the FFPS and neither can their institutions subscribe to *Oryx*. One of the FFPS's major concerns for some time has been the fact that many conservationists in developing countries who would like to receive *Oryx* have no funds to pay for a subscription, either personal or institutional. While we pay for a limited number of free subscriptions, we cannot afford to supply all those people who would benefit from such an arrangement: our post bag yields an increasing number of these. For this reason, the FFPS introduced a new sponsor category of membership at the AGM in October 1994, which enables members to sponsor subscriptions in countries where shortage of foreign currency is a barrier to FFPS membership. We have a list of institutions, many in the republics of the former USSR as well as elsewhere, that would welcome such assistance. Please consider helping in this way if you can: further details are available from the FFPS Secretariat.

Jacqui Morris, Editor