

International

Creation of sensitive sea areas goes ahead

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has classified the Baltic Sea, the Galapagos Islands and the Canary Islands as Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs). The designation requires ships to take special care when navigating through such areas and allows the IMO to choose the best protective measures. Russia had led opposition to the scheme, mainly because of an anticipated massive increase in shipping due to plans to expand oil export through the Baltic Sea passage. Liberia and Panama, the two largest flags of convenience states, also opposed the designation. WWF has called on the Russian Federation to add its own waters to the Baltic Sea PSSA and to establish a strictly separated shipping traffic lane and compulsory pilotage in the Baltic Sea.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 48(11–12), 1012.

Questions raised over effectiveness of current protected areas system

At the World Parks Congress in Caracas, Venezuela in 1993, a target was set that 10% of the world's surface should be included in protected areas. It was revealed at the Fifth World Parks Congress in 2003 that the global network of protected areas now covers 11.5% of the world's surface. However, the conservation value of such targets has been questioned by a group of scientists who used five global data sets on the distribution of species to test the effectiveness of protected areas in representing species diversity. The study showed that the global protected area network was still far from complete with 12% of the species studied not represented in any protected area. It is predicted that other groups of species with high endemism, such as plants and insects, would be even less well represented. To be truly effective, the protected area system should account for biodiversity patterns rather than rely on general percentage-based targets.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 428(6983), 640–643.

Identification manual to help conservation of seahorses

In November 2002 all 33 species of seahorses (genus *Hippocampus*) were included on Appendix II of CITES. The actual listing was deferred until May 2004 to allow countries to put into force policies to enforce the decision. Seahorses were one of the first commercially valuable marine species to be included on CITES. To assist with enforcement, TRAFFIC and Project Seahorse have produced an identification manual. The manual has been produced to help countries to ensure that commercial trade in seahorses is not detrimental to wild populations. The guide is particularly useful since many seahorse species are similar in appearance. It will be made available to customs agents and law enforcement officials in all 166 countries that are currently parties to CITES.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2004), 22, 12.

Forest Stewardship Council to consider new labels

In June 2004 the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which certifies that timber has come from well managed and sustainable sources, were planning to finalize new Chain of Custody and labelling standards. It is thought that they will shift to a system that allows three FSC labels: a 'green' label for pure FSC forest products, a 'brown' label for those containing a proportion of FSC forest products, and a recycled label.

Source: *Taiga-News* (2004), 47, 2.

Tourism has positive benefit on turtle survival

A new report from WWF, *Money Talks: Economic Aspects of Marine Turtle Use and Conservation*, has shown that turtles are worth a lot more alive than they are as eggs, meat or products made from their shells. The report compared the revenue generated from killing turtles or collecting their eggs to that derived from tourism. At nine sites where turtles were used or killed, the average annual income was £320,000 while at nine turtle tourism sites the income averaged £940,000 a year. At Tortuguero National Park in Costa Rica, there were more than 60,000 visitors in 2002, 26,000 of whom took part in guided walks to look at turtles; this generated revenue of £3.7 million. The report also showed that turtle populations were declining at sites where they were exploited, and stable or rising at sites where they were not.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(6), 16

Number of threatened sharks grows

A week-long workshop was recently held at Mote Marine Laboratory, Florida, with the aim of assessing the conservation status of sharks and rays found in North and Central American waters. This concluded that the number of sharks and rays on the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* was set to grow. The workshop highlighted the fact that slow growing sharks and rays are vulnerable to overfishing but also that species can recover if strict management is imposed before declines become critical. The results of the meeting also highlighted how species can become endangered through incidental catch and that there are many species rated as Least Concern (the lowest IUCN category of threat) in US waters that still face threats from unregulated fishing off Mexico and Central America.

Source: <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc>

Concern over declines in wader populations in Africa and western Eurasia

The International Wader Study Group has recently published a major review of the status of the migratory wader species in Africa and western Eurasia. This highlights that nearly half of the world's known wader populations are in decline. The review assesses the status of 131 distinct populations of 55 migratory wader species in the region, updates an assessment of the East Atlantic Flyway undertaken in the 1980s and provides for the first time a review of all three principal migratory flyways in Africa and western Eurasia.

Source: <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc>

Resumption of commercial whaling moves a step closer

In July 2004, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) moved a step closer to agreeing to the resumption of commercial whaling. The hunt would be limited by quotas, inspectors would accompany whaling ships and a DNA database would ensure that only legally caught whale meat could be sold. The 57 members of the IWC did not, however, set a date when commercial whaling could resume. The IWC did agree to 'proceed expeditiously' to complete the rules for sustainable whale harvest, known as the Revised Management System, in time for its 'possible' adoption at the next meeting in Korea in 2005.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 183(2458), 6.

Europe

EU demands full assessment of major road scheme

The Via Baltica expressway is a controversial road building scheme that will run from Helsinki to Warsaw. The scheme poses a serious threat to four sites of EU conservation importance. The EU is now demanding that Polish authorities must complete a Strategic Environmental Assessment before deciding on the route of the Via Baltica. Of particular concern is a section of the route near Białystok, where an independent expert from the Council of Europe has confirmed that the Polish government's preferred route will cause significantly more ecological damage than the alternative.

Source: *BirdLife in Europe* (2004), 9(1), 1.

Expanded EU brings concerns about wildlife trade

The European Union now has 25 members and this has raised concerns about a possible increase in wildlife trade. The wildlife-trade monitoring network, TRAFFIC, has highlighted that more than 1,000 endangered tortoises were smuggled into Poland and Malta in recent years. More tortoises from Madagascar and parrots from the Amazon have been kept illegally in the Czech Republic. There are also differences in wildlife trade regulations between old and new EU members that allow dealers to sell animals in Western Europe.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(6), 19.

Iceland abandons major part of scientific whaling programme

The Icelandic government has decided to put a major part of their scientific whaling programme on hold and limit this year's take to 25 minke whales. This decision is the result of strong domestic criticism and a lack of markets for whale meat. Iceland resumed whaling in 2003 and since then has caught 36 minke whales. The market for whale meat is small and decreasing and Iceland still has an ample supply of whale meat left since last year's take. Tourism organizations have made it clear that whaling will damage Iceland's reputation; tourism has become a major money-earner for Iceland with whale watching attracting 72,000 tourists each year and bringing in \$14.6 million annually to the Icelandic economy.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(1–2), 4.

WWF criticizes Spitzbergen oil plans

Norway plans to allow the Russians to go ahead with test drilling in the Spitzbergen Fjord in the high Arctic, a move condemned by WWF. While Spitzbergen is administered by Norway, Russia has historical claims to drill for oil because of its previous coal mining activities in the area. The planned drilling site is home to polar bears, ringed seal, arctic fox, rare plants and tens of thousands of seabirds. Spitzbergen was recently given a greater degree of protection by the Norwegian Government and WWF is calling on the government to ban drilling for oil in the whole Svalbard archipelago, which includes Spitzbergen.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 48(11–12), 1013.

Census shows the importance of the British Isles for seabirds

The *Seabird 2000* census, which involved more than 1,000 surveyors counting 3,200 colonies along 40,000 km of coastline and at 900 inland sites, has shown the international importance of the British Isles for seabirds. They host more than two-thirds of the world's northern gannets *Sula bassanus*, 90% of its Manx shearwaters *Puffinus puffinus* and 60% of the global population of great skuas *Catharacta skua*.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2004), 26(2), 5.

Dredging proposal for the Dee Estuary is turned down

The Dee Estuary is one of the most important and highly protected nature conservation sites in the UK. It has exceptional populations of overwintering wading birds and ducks and, amongst other things, is a Ramsar site. Proposals for dredging in the Dee Estuary have been initially turned down by the Environment Agency Wales, the Department of Transport and the Welsh Assembly. The dredging proposal was submitted by the Port of Mostyn who had undertaken trial dredging to assess the likely environmental impact. The report of these trials was considered inadequate. However, there is a possibility that, despite the negative impact, dredging may be allowed on the basis of Overriding Public Interest as the proposals have an important economic significance for the Welsh economy.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 48(9–10), 813.

UK ratifies albatross and petrel agreement

The UK and three UK Overseas Territories, the Falkland Islands, British Antarctic Territory and South Georgia/South Sandwich Islands, has become the sixth nation to ratify the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels under the Bonn Convention. Ratification means that longline vessels fishing in UK waters will be legally bound to employ mitigation measures to prevent accidental killing of seabirds. The UK will also need to take action to conserve important seabird breeding and feeding areas, and address pollution and disease in seabird colonies. However, the ratification does not include the Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha, where there are vital breeding sites for Tristan albatross *Diomedea dabbenena*, Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos* and spectacled petrel *Procellaria conspicillata*.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2004), 26(2), 8.

Scheme to expand coastal mudflats and saltmarshes in the UK

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the UK now has three sites where it has allowed the sea wall to be breached so that the land can flood, creating more intertidal mudflats and saltmarshes, habitats that are disappearing because of the rise in sea levels. The sites are Freiston Shore in Lincolnshire, Nigg Bay in north-east Scotland and Havergate Island in Suffolk. At Freiston, the sea wall was breached in August 2002 and by 2003, the new saltmarsh was being used by 100 twites and over 1,000 ducks and geese. At Nigg Bay, five species of saltmarsh plants have colonised the site and a flock of more than 200 redshanks have been seen feeding there.

Source: *RSPB Reserves Annual Report 2002/03*, 7.

Plan for airport at Cliffe is dropped

In 2003 the UK Government announced that they were considering plans to develop a new airport at Cliffe in south-east England to deal with increasing levels of air passenger traffic. The proposed development threatened one of the most important wetlands in Europe that provides a habitat for up to 200,000 wading birds. The airport would have directly affected four Important Bird Areas and a network of reserves. Following a huge publicity campaign led by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the scheme has now been dropped.

Source: *BirdLife in Europe* (2004), 9(1), 4.

Capercaillie recovers again

The capercaillie is a turkey-sized grouse found in Scotland. Fifteen years ago it was voted as the species most likely to become extinct in the UK. Capercaillie have already become extinct once in the UK but the species was successfully reintroduced in the 1830s. However, in the 1970s the decline started again with numbers falling from a possible 20,000 to only 1,000 in 1999. A new survey has now put capercaillie numbers at 2,000. The increase has been the result of predator control, habitat management and the removal of many miles of deer fencing, which the capercaillie has a habit of flying into.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(8), 21.

Organic rice from the Ebro Delta wins food award

The Ebro Delta in Spain is one of the most important wetlands in the western Mediterranean and is the second largest in the country. Organic white and brown rice grown on a farm in the delta has won the Best New Food Product award at the Natural Products and Organic Industry Awards held in London in April 2004. The farm is managed with both food production and wildlife conservation in mind and is being marketed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the UK. Agriculture, particularly rice growing, is the most important activity in the delta and covers 320 km².

Source: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/04/rice_award.html

Iberian lynx population is less than 150

A new report has shown that there are now just 135 Iberian lynx left in the wild and there are only 28 breeding females. A breeding programme, which has two young cubs, is ongoing at Jerez Zoo in southern Spain but there are concerns that a mixture of road building, intensive farming, the clearing of cork oak forests and myxomatosis in their main prey, rabbits, could lead to extinction within three years.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(6), 17

Athens Olympics cause major environmental damage

The Sydney Olympics of 2000 were known as the 'green Olympics' but this is not the case with the Athens games of 2004. In July 2004, WWF-Greece rated the

games as only 0.8 on a scale of 0 to 4 with the only good point being the investment in public transport in the city. Unlike Sydney, Athens will not use solar power for any of its Olympic sites. The rowing centre has destroyed an important wetland and forests. The Olympic and press villages have been built on greenfield sites and a promised ecological park has never materialized. Native trees that were to be planted have been replaced by thirsty foreign species that need irrigation and there are genuine concerns that Athens could run short of water during the games.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 183 (2457), 5.

North Eurasia

New draft Forest Code is adopted by the Russian government

More than half of Russia's territory is covered by forest. In 2000 the Russian government began a process of reforming the state forestry agencies and forest legislation. This has culminated in a new draft Forest Code that was adopted by the Russian government on 18 March 2004. Conservationists have expressed concern that the code gives permission for forest privatization, sale of forest lands, building cottages in protected forests and special protection areas and conversion of forest lands into other land categories. It decreases forest control and favours illegal logging. A number of conservation organizations have prepared detailed comments on the draft and the general consensus is that it is too early to introduce forest privatization in Russia, particularly as it may significantly restrict civil rights.

Source: *Arborvitae* (2004), 25, 4.

Russian customs intercepts huge consignment of wildlife products

Customs officials in the Russian Far East have intercepted a consignment of over 800 bear paws and other body parts from endangered Asiatic black bears, plus thousands of other pelts, antlers and organs, all of which were destined for Chinese medicine markets. The haul is estimated to be worth at least US \$20 million and represents a huge amount of illegal hunting of rare and endangered animals.

Source: *Taiga-News* (2004), 47, 3.

Sighting of the rare Caucasus leopard

It is 50 years since there was a confirmed sighting of the rare Caucasus leopard but scientists have recently captured an image of a leopard during a photo trapping study in the former Soviet republic of Georgia. The species was found among open pistachio and juniper woodlands in the arid south-east of Georgia. A camera trap had been set up in the Vashlovani Nature Reserve after the discovery of leopard prints. Hunting of the bezoar goat, a favourite prey species of the leopard, is thought to have driven the young male from the mountain forests where it is thought to occur. Biologists have asked the Georgian president to provide funds for increased protection against poaching.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(7), 18.

North Africa and Middle East

Concern over hunting of eagles in Turkey

A German ornithologist has drawn attention to the hunting of eagles and other raptors in the Hatay province in southern Turkey. It was found that raptors were being shot all-year-round and that rich hunters were coming from far afield. The focus of the hunting is around Samandang, which is a raptor hotspot. On 23 March 2004, in just over one hour's observation, 77 steppe buzzards, 61 lesser spotted eagles, 29 short-toed eagles, two black kites and one Egyptian vulture were counted.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(6), 16.

Canada pledges funds to restore Iraqi marshes

The Canadian government has pledged US \$3 million to help restore the Mesopotamian marshes of southern Iraq. The scheme will help to repatriate former inhabitants of the region and improve the outlook for the region's birds. The Mesopotamian marshes are one of the largest wetlands in the Middle East and provide a vital stopover point for migrating waterbirds. During the 1990s, the wetlands were reduced to just 7% of their former size due to dam construction upstream in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Almost the entire population

of the Endangered Basra reed-warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* breeds in these marshes.

Source: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/06/mesopotamia_marshes.html

Sub-Saharan Africa

Captive rhinos killed by overdose of iron

Black rhino populations are recovering, but the species is still rare in the wild. Attempts to breed black rhinos in captivity have been largely unsuccessful, with over half the animals in American zoos dying prematurely. Rhinos have died from chronic anaemia that veterinary surgeons believe was caused by high iron levels in the blood. This is exactly the opposite of the human situation where anaemia is caused by low iron levels. A study of rhino blood chemistry has shown that the red blood cells contain 50 times as much tyrosine as human red blood cells. Tyrosine is thought to protect against excess iron. In the wild rhinos browse on acacia that is low in iron and may be high in tyrosine. In captivity their diet may result in their getting higher levels of iron and lower levels of tyrosine. Scientists are now experimenting with different variations of the captive diet.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 183(2458), 12.

Ruwenzori Mountains are removed from danger list

The Ruwenzori Mountains National Park has been removed from UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger. The park had been originally listed because of civil unrest, lack of funding, poaching and encroachment, but the situation has now improved and park management has regained full control of the area. The Ruwenzori Mountains are home to over a quarter of Uganda's bird species and are the most reliable water source of the River Nile.

Source: *Africa Geographic* (2004), 12(7), 10.

Key area of primate diversity is protected in Rwanda.

The government of Rwanda has recently established the Nyungwe National Park in an area that is considered one of the world's most important for primate

diversity. The park contains 13 species of primates, 275 bird species and 260 species of trees and shrubs. Primates present in the park include chimpanzees, L'hoests monkeys, grey-cheeked managbaeys, owl-faced guenons and Angolan black-and-white colobus. Nyungwe and the neighbouring Kibira National Park in Burundi now form the largest block of protected rain forest in East Africa.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation* (2004), June, 10.

Sudan rebels responsible for ivory poaching in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Poachers linked to the Sudanese rebel organization, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, are killing elephants for their ivory in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The poachers have targeted the Garamba National Park near the border with Sudan, where a park official has estimated that only 14,000 elephants remain, compared to 90,000 before the civil war began in 1997. Despite ivory trade being banned under CITES, ivory is still being sold at the main tourist market in Kinshasa.

Source: *Africa Geographic* (2004), 12(5), 14.

Mugabe plan threatens black rhinos

The President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, has announced plans to nationalize all white-owned land, a move that could have a highly damaging effect on conservation in the country. Large areas of poorer farmland in Zimbabwe are registered as privately owned 'conservancies' where management of wildlife for tourism and hunting takes precedence over commercial farming. Some of these conservancies have been particularly important for the threatened black rhino, with most of the income for the areas coming from commercial hunting, which is still big business despite the current political situation. After nationalization the government plans a lease-back option but there is no guarantee that leases will be offered to the former owners.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(8), 18–19.

Chilli peppers may be answer to reducing elephant damage

Areas surrounding the Liwonde National Park in Malawi have been devastated by raiding elephants that have destroyed crops and trampled people to death. A novel method of deterring elephants is now being tried.

The Chilli Pepper Production Project has been planting bird's eye chillies, grown for the European market, along the park fence on the eastern boundary. It is clear that elephants hate the chillies and avoid areas where the plants are growing.

Source: *Africa Geographic* (2004), 12(5), 14–15.

Ban on military aircraft flights to protect Cape vultures

New South African Air Force regulations have stipulated that military aircraft will no longer be allowed to fly within 25,000 feet (7.62 km) of Cape vulture colonies. The action follows information from local landowners who reported that military aircraft were disturbing Cape vulture colonies in the Magaliesberg area. The Endangered Wildlife Trust, who helped negotiate the agreement, hopes that commercial aircraft will follow suit; a collision between a vulture and any aircraft would spell disaster for all concerned.

Source: *Africa Geographic* (2004), 12(5), 15.

South Africa announces protection for Bird Island

Bird Island in South Africa is home to the world's largest gannet colony and contains several endangered and threatened bird species such as the roseate tern and the African penguin. It is also surrounded by reefs that are the habitat of many highly endangered reef fish species and abalone (perlemoen). A 24 nautical mile square zone around the island is to be gazetted as a marine protected area and the group of four islands, of which Bird Island is the largest, will be managed as part of the Greater Addo National Park. No fishing or diving will be allowed there.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(1–2), 7.

New World Heritage Site for South Africa

The Cape Floristic Region in South Africa has been officially recognised as the country's sixth World Heritage Site. The region covers an area of > 553,000 ha and is one of the richest areas in the world for plants. It comprises eight separate protected areas that stretch from the Cape Peninsula, including Table Mountain, into the Eastern Cape. More than 9,000 plant species occur in the Cape Floristic Region, 6,000 of which are endemic.

Source: *Africa Geographic* (2004), 12(7), 10.

Sharks to benefit from lifting of nets

The entire shark net structure along the KwaZulu-Natal coastline from Zinkwazi in the north to Port Edward in the south is to be lifted to accommodate the sardine run that occurs along this part of the coast every year in the winter months. Massive sardine shoals are accompanied by thousands of dolphins, sharks and other marine animals that become entangled in the nets. The lifting of the nets has meant that a major surfing competition has been cancelled.

Source: *Africa Geographic* (2004), 12(7), 10.

Nosy Ve is last fully protected colony of Madagsacan radiated tortoise

The small 30 ha island of Nosy Ve off the south-west coast of Madagascar is now thought to contain the last fully protected colony of the threatened Madagsacan radiated tortoise *Geochelone radiata*. Mainland populations of the species have been put under increasing pressure due to collection for food, the pet trade and habitat destruction (see also *Oryx*, 37(3), 338–343). Nosy Ve has the status of a sacred burial site and is protected through *fady* (local taboo) against any kind of disturbance. The *fady* is incorporated into a legally respected, local community convention called a *dina*. So far, only four male tortoises have been found on Nosy Ve but the local respect for the island may aid the species' colonization.

Source: *Turtle and Tortoise Newsletter* (2004), 7, 26–27.

South and South-east Asia

Tri-national task force established to control trade in ramin

The governments of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have committed to working together more closely to control the trade in ramin, a valuable commercial timber species. At a workshop held in Kuala Lumpur in April 2004 it was agreed that a tri-national task force should be established to increase law enforcement cooperation on ramin trade and effective implementation of CITES. Delegates from the three countries are now consulting at ministerial level to determine how the task force should operate. Ramin belongs to the genus *Gonystylus*, which is distributed throughout South-east Asia and in the Nicobar,

Solomon and Fiji Islands. There has been considerable exploitation of *G. bancanus* whose timber is used for internal building construction, planks, cases, picture frames and snooker cues. In 2003 Malaysia exported 62,778 m³ of ramin sawn timber with a value of >RM50 million.

Source: <http://www.traffic.org/news/timber.html>

India's most famous tiger reserve threatened by tourism

The Ranthambore Tiger Reserve is the best known protected area in India where one can see tigers. However, the Field Director of the reserve has accused 'politically influential hotel owners' of endangering the park's future through uncontrolled tourism. In the past decade, visitor numbers have soared to 67,981 a year and are expected to reach 100,000 a year in the next 5 years. Luxury resorts have been built in ecologically sensitive areas. It has been proposed that there should be no increase in the 14 jeeps and eight minibuses allowed daily to enter the park to see the estimated 40 tigers. It has also been recommended that a 10% tax be imposed on hotel room rates to help protect the environment and local communities.

Source: *Cat News* (2004), 40, 4.

Bhutan agrees forest management code

A comprehensive forest management code has been agreed by Bhutan to act as a basic tool for forest management planners and implementers. The code includes elements for laying down short, medium and long-term planning along with socio-economic surveys, monitoring and evaluation, operational planning, forest management inventory and health and safety issues.

Source: *Arborvitae* (2004), 25, 4.

Myanmar declares world's largest tiger reserve

The government of Myanmar has declared the 21,756 km² Hukawng Valley Tiger Reserve for tigers, making it the largest protected area in the world for these animals. The Reserve is part of Myanmar's Northern Forest Complex, a network of contiguous protected areas that covers over 31,000 km², one of the largest protected forest areas in Asia. The Reserve currently harbours 80–100 tigers but scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) believe that number could increase 10-fold. WCS is helping the Myanmar Forest Department to draw up management plans for the area that include training and education,

park infrastructure and local community development initiatives.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation* (2004), June, 9.

Myanmar forests being lost at a rapid rate

Myanmar's northern old-growth temperate rainforests are being wiped out by timber companies from Yunnan in China, according to a new report *A Conflict of Interests: The Uncertain Future of Burma's Forests* by Global Witness. In 2002 logging represented 9.3% of Myanmar's foreign earnings but illegal logging put even greater pressure on the country's forests. China imported over 1 million m³ of timber from Myanmar in 2002 and was predicted to import over 1.4 million m³ in 2003. This has led to the destruction of large stretches of pristine forests in Kachin. Independent observers put forest cover in Myanmar at 30% and decreasing rapidly.

Source: *Living Forests* (2004), 7, 48.

Viet Nam launches national action plan to strengthen wildlife trade controls

In June 2004 Viet Nam launched its National Action Plan to Strengthen Trade Controls of Wild Species of Fauna and Flora from 2004 to 2010. The plan follows months of surveys, field research and input from conservation experts, Vietnamese agencies and international NGOs. The action plan entailed the assembly of national research teams to investigate key themes relating to wildlife trade: government capacity, economics, awareness, research, legislation and international cooperation. One of the key recommendations from the research teams was the establishment of a centralized information system to enable the sharing of information between government authorities.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2004), 22, 5–9.

Lao PDR joins CITES

TRAFFIC and WWF have commended the decision by the Lao People's Democratic Republic to join CITES. The Lao PDR shares borders with five major wildlife producer and consumer countries in the region: Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam and the country is an important route for cross-border wildlife trade in CITES-protected species such as Asiatic black bears, leopards, pangolins and primates. Also worrying is the number of ivory products currently on sale in the Lao PDR. TRAFFIC and WWF are working

with the Lao PDR and other countries in the ASEAN network to encourage actions that promote wildlife trade that is both legal and sustainable. The accession of the Lao PDR brings the number of parties to CITES to 165.

Source: http://www.traffic.org/news/wwf_commend.html

Record number of vultures seen in Cambodia

At least 28 Critically Endangered slender-billed vultures *Gyps tenuirostris* have been sighted in Siem Pang District in north-east Cambodia, at least four times as many as at the previous largest count in Indochina. In total, more than 120 vultures were seen, including another Critically Endangered species, the white-rumped vulture *Gyps bengalensis*. The discovery was made during a recent 'vulture restaurant' training course organized by BirdLife International and the Wildlife Conservation Society. These discoveries assume even greater significance when seen against the dramatic decline in vulture populations in South Asia, recently attributed to use of the veterinary drug diclofenac. Fortunately, diclofenac is rarely used in Cambodia.

Source: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/06/cambodia_vulture_news.html

Sumatran tiger is close to extinction

A recent report by WWF and TRAFFIC, *Nowhere to Hide: The Trade in the Sumatran Tiger*, paints a bleak picture for the future of Sumatran tigers. Between 1998 and 2002, as many as 50 Sumatran tigers were poached each year. There are now thought to be 400–500 tigers left in the wild in Sumatra (see also *Oryx*, 37(1), 41–48). Hunting is being driven by a substantial domestic Indonesian market for tiger skins and other parts, especially claws and teeth for trophies, charms and souvenirs. Loss of habitat is also a major threat. Two other Indonesian tiger subspecies have already become extinct, the Bali tiger in the 1940s and the Javan tiger in the 1980s.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2004), 22, 1.

East Asia

Latest survey shows big increase in giant panda numbers

A new survey of giant pandas carried out by WWF and China's State Forestry

Administration estimates that there are 1,590 pandas in the wild, >40% more than previously believed. However, WWF has warned that the apparent increase may be the result of the more sophisticated counting techniques used today. The latest survey involved 170 people surveying >23,000 km² of rugged mountain terrain in the provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi and Sichuan. Pandas were found in areas where they had not previously been recorded. Researchers used up to eight different counting methods, including route investigation, faecal analysis and GPS systems. Results were recorded in a GIS database. There are now plans to identify priority sites and establish more corridors between isolated panda groups.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(8), 22.

New dam to be built on the Hongshui River

China is planning to dam the Hongshui River in Guangxi province at a cost of RMB ¥24.3 billion (US \$2.9 billion). The Longtan power plant, the largest in the country after the Three Gorges Dam, will have a capacity of 4,200 megawatts. Parts of the Buliuhe and Chuandonghe Nature Reserves which support over 5,000 rhesus monkeys *Macacca mulatta* will be modified by the flooding. A total of 200 km² of fruit-tree forest in the macaque's habitat. Relevant authorities will also transplant rare and endangered plants, carry out trials of riparian forest recovery and establish nurseries.

Source: *Living Forests* (2004), 7, 52.

Survey shows Taiwan's coral reef cover has been reduced by half

A recent survey by the Chinese Coral Reef Society (CCRS) has revealed that the live cover of most species of deep-ocean stony corals in eight major coral reef areas around Taiwan has fallen below 50% and in some cases is less than 10%. The CCRS has monitored coral reefs for seven consecutive years and discovered that most near-shore reefs have suffered extensive damage from human activities and natural events such as typhoons. At least six of 15 species of indicator reef fish species and invertebrates once commonly seen in Taiwan's waters have disappeared. There are now calls for Taiwan to establish a coral reef conservation area.

Source: *International Conservation Newsletter* (2004), 12(1), 2–4.

North America

Marketplace campaigns to protect Canada's boreal forests

Greenpeace, ForestEthics, Natural Resources Defense Council and Rainforest Action Network have written to 600 mostly US and Canadian-based big companies asking them to use their influence to protect endangered boreal forests in Canada by adopting sound environmental procurement policies. ForestEthics and others have also named and shamed Lands' End, Sears, LL Bean, William-Sonoma, Pottery Barn Ltd, Victoria's Secret, J Crew and JC Penney who collectively produce over a billion catalogues a year, many of which use paper that comes from endangered forests; all have refused to change their paper purchasing policies. Greenpeace has also released a *Shopper's Guide to Ancient Forest Friendly Tissue Products* that encourages consumers only to buy tissue products that are not sourced from endangered forests.

Source: *Taiga-News* (2004), 47, 3.

Colorado River is facing most serious drought in 500 years

The Grand Canyon area of the US, through which the Colorado River flows, is facing one of the most severe droughts since the mid-1500s. The US Geological Survey has used observations and tree ring measurements to reconstruct the Colorado River's water flow over the past 500 years. They found that the average annual flow from 1999 to 2003 was almost twice as low as during the dust bowl years of the 1930s and even lower than the severe drought of 1590–94. The drought is probably a symptom of climate change.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 429(6994), 796.

Beluga sturgeon is listed as threatened

On 21 April 2004 the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced that it was listing the beluga sturgeon *Huso huso* as threatened under the US Endangered Species Act; the listing will take effect 6 months from the date of this announcement. These fish are the source of the highly prized beluga caviar and have suffered from unregulated overfishing, loss of spawning habitat and poaching. The listing will allow the USFWS to issue the regulations necessary to conserve the species.

Source: *The TRAFFIC Report* (2004), 3(1), 3.

Blue whales return to Alaskan waters

Blue whales *Balaenoptera musculus* have been sighted off the coast of Alaska for the first time in 30 years. The species had previously been hunted close to extinction. Scientists photographed the blue whales 200 km south-east of Prince William Sound. An ocean-floor recording system had recorded blue whales in the past few years but the photographs are the first conclusive evidence of their presence. One of the photographed blue whales appears to be the same individual that has been spotted in recent years off southern California, although further analysis of the photographs will be needed to confirm this.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 430(6999), 496.

Flawed science may be threatening survival of Florida panther

The Florida panther *Felis concolor coryi* is a rare subspecies of the cougar that is restricted to the southern tip of the Florida peninsula; there are thought to be 80–100 animals left. Biologists are concerned that the use of flawed science by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) may affect the animal's continued survival. Daytime habitat use by the panther is considered largely equivalent to night-time ranging behaviour but given that the panther is largely nocturnal, this could underestimate habitat needs. Population models used by the USFWS also assume that all panthers are breeders that enjoy high reproductive success. It is argued that areas of the western Everglades still contain good refuges for panthers but these are also areas where development projects such as golf courses and a new college and associated small town are being planned.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(7), 22–23.

New style of hook aims to reduce turtle bycatch

The three-year ban on longline fishing for swordfish off Hawaii was due to be lifted in May 2004. On 12 April 2004, the US National Marine Fisheries Service published rules that would permit longline fishing using a circular hook that has been found to catch fewer turtles. The standard J-shaped hook catches at least 40,000 turtles a year. There are to be government monitors on every boat and if turtle catches exceed 16 leatherback or 17 loggerhead turtles in the season, the ban will be reimposed.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 428 (6983), 594.

Fishing nets may lead to extinction of rare porpoise

One of the world's most endangered marine mammals, the vaquita *Phocoena sinus*, is dying in fishing nets at an alarming rate in the Gulf of California off Mexico. At least six of the porpoises have died in nets in the first half of 2004. The vaquita is found only in the Gulf of California and numbers have dwindled to <600 after years of becoming accidentally snagged in fishing nets. The fishing community blames a lack of flow in the Colorado River caused by the large number of US-owned dams on the waterway, which is limiting the amount of fresh water entering the Gulf and thereby reducing the vaquita's food supply. However, marine scientists are adamant that nets are to blame. Various conservation groups are proposing that the Mexican government divert US \$50 million, currently used to subsidize fuel prices for the shrimp fishing industry, to instead purchase trawlers and decommission them. This, however, is being opposed by the trawling industry.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 429(6992), 590.

Central America and Caribbean

First release of headstarted Anegada iguanas

The Anegada iguana *Cyclura pinguis* is one of the most endangered lizards in the world. It is found only on the island of Anegada in the British Virgin Islands, where it now occupies only a fraction of the island's area. Threats include loss of habitat, overgrazing by feral livestock and predation of hatchlings by cats. The British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust, IUCN/SSC Iguana Specialist Group, Forth Worth Zoo and the Zoological Society of San Diego initiated a headstarting programme for the iguana in 1997, and in 2003 it was felt that the older juveniles from this programme could survive in the wild. The first release of headstarted iguanas was in October 2003. Twenty-four iguanas were released, 12 males and 12 females, ranging in age from 4–6 years and in weight from 750–2,050 g. As of April 2004, 84% of the released animals had survived and it was anticipated that some of the released females would lay eggs for the first time in July 2004. Additional releases are planned for October 2004.

Source: *Species* (2004), 41, 4.

South America

New National Park in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest

On 7 June 2004 the Brazilian government published a decree creating the 57,000 ha Serra do Itajaí National Park in the east of the state of Santa Catarina. The park takes in part of nine municipalities and covers springs and headwaters vital for the region. The Itajaí valley has one of the largest remaining tracts of Atlantic forest in southern Brazil and protects 78% of the mammals (including notably the southern brown howler *Alouatta guariba* and the black-horned capucin *Cebus nigritus*), 38% of the birds and 47% of the trees and shrubs known to occur in the state.

Source: <http://www.socioambiental.org>

Park in the Cerrado is more than doubled in size

The 84,000 ha Grande Sertao Verdas National Park in the Cerrado in the north-west of Minas Gerais state in Brazil was created in 1989. It is on the Central Plateau that divides the basins of the Rios Tocantins and São Francisco and protects gallery forests along the headwaters of the Rios Preto and Carinhanha and their springs, called *veredas*, which are marked by concentrations of palms. These areas are used by a range of species such as giant anteater *Myrmecophaga tridactyla*, maned wolf *Chrysocyon brachyurus* and rheas *Rhea americana*. On 21 May 2004 the size of this park was doubled to more than 231,000 ha, extending it to the border with the state of Bahia. This will allow the creation of an extended ecological corridor with the Serra Geral in Bahia.

Source: <http://www.socioambiental.org>

Oil company plans pipeline across Ecuadorian Biosphere Reserve

The Brazilian oil company PetroBras is finalizing plans to build a 45 km access road into the heart of the Yasuni National Park in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The national park's outstanding biodiversity was recognized in 1989 when it was designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The proposed road will open access into previously remote primary rainforest as well as bisecting the territory of the Chiru Isla Quichua indigenous community living along the Rio Napo. Two other major oil projects in the Yasuni National Park are in the earlier

stages of development and there are concerns that the new road could lead to wave of road building within the park.

Source: <http://forests.org/action/ecdudaor>

Rare Andean cat found in Bolivia

The Andean cat *Oreailurus jacobita* is listed as Endangered by IUCN and is one of the most threatened cats in the Americas; its basic ecology and behaviour remain largely unknown (see also *Oryx*, 37(3), 374–377). On 25 April 2004 scientists captured and radio-collared an adult female Andean cat at Khastor Hill in south-west Bolivia. The animal was captured at 4,712 m in a rocky, mountainous area above a *bofedal*, a year-round stream flowing from the mountains that supports various cushion grasses, which are typically used to graze llamas. Following release, the animal was to be monitored day and night to provide data that will contribute to a better understanding of this little known species (see also pp. 368–369).

Source: *Cat News* (2004), 40, 2.

Bolivian park is a world hotspot for jaguars

The 34,000 km² Kaa-Iya Park in Bolivia contains Latin America's highest diversity of large mammals, including the endangered Chacoan guanaco *Lama guanaco*, eight species of armadillo *Euphactus* spp. and the Chacoan peccary *Catagonus wagneri*, a species once believed to be extinct. It now has the accolade of the world's richest protected area for jaguars *Panthera onca*. A recent camera trapping study by the Wildlife Conservation Society and other groups concluded that there were as many as 1,000 jaguars in the park. The park was created in 1995 and is the only protected area in South America established on the initiative of a Native American organization.

Source: *Cat News* (2004), 40, 11.

Protection for Patagonia's coastal wildlife

The Argentine Government has signed a comprehensive plan to safeguard the 2,000-mile coastal zone of Patagonia. The plan will protect the area from harmful development activities, including overfishing and unregulated tourism. Patagonia's rugged coastline is home to two species of penguin, including a concentration of hundreds of thousands of Megallanic penguins at Punta Tombo

and the largest known colony of rock-hopper penguins, numbering 200,000, in Tierra del Fuego. There are also large colonies of elephant seals, southern sea lions and right whales. Implementation of the plan has been funded by the UNDP and GEF, which approved a grant of US \$5.2 million to assist the provinces for the next 5 years.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 48(11–12), 1013.

Six new conservation districts established in Santiago area in Chile

Santiago is an ever expanding metropolis that is threatening the fauna and flora of surrounding areas. A new initiative from the National Environmental Commission (CONAMA) has led to the creation of six new conservation districts that will receive a natural sanctuary designation. The six areas are: the Upper Cantillana mountain range, south-west of the capital; the El Roble mountain in the coastal mountain range, north-east of Santiago just above the community of Caleu; the Upper Rio Maipo, in the south-east; El Morado in the high Andes; the area around Rio Olivares, Rio Colorado and Tupungato, east of the city; and the Batucu wetlands, just north of Santiago. The protected areas total almost 610,000 ha.

Source: *Santiago Times* (2004), 6 July.

Pacific

Kingfisher returns to Guam

The Micronesian kingfisher *Halcyon cinnamomina cinnamomina* was driven to extinction on the island of Guam by the introduction of the brown tree snake during World War Two. After a 20-year captive breeding effort, the birds have finally been returned to Guam. Efforts to breed the birds in captivity at Bronx Zoo in the US have been hampered by unreliable reproductive success and high mortality in young adult birds. In response to these disappointments, an aviary was established on Guam and in September 2003 three male birds were successfully transferred to the island. The first breeding pair of kingfishers was due to arrive in spring 2004.

Source: *International Zoo News* (2004), 51/3(332), 168–169.

Australia/Antarctica/New Zealand

Prize for fishermen who reduced seabird losses from longlining

Two fishermen, one from New Zealand and one from Australia, have shared a prize of €18,000 in an international competition run by SEO/BirdLife (BirdLife in Spain) that aimed to encourage fishermen to design ways of stopping seabirds being killed during longlining operations. Both men had submitted the idea of dripping fish liver grease on the water behind vessels as they were bait setting. The grease is obtained from the livers of fish that would otherwise be thrown overboard and its presence in the water deters birds. In addition, a bird-scaring streamerline was used during setting operations. These methods had helped to reduce bird mortalities to c. five birds a year. There are now plans to test the use of fish liver grease to ensure there are no negative effects.

Source: *Africa Birds & Birding* (2004), 9(3), 13.

Yellowheads thrive on new island home

The yellowhead or Mohua *Mohoua ochrocephala* was once common in the forests of the South Island of New Zealand, but in the past 30 years numbers have declined dramatically as a result of forest clearance and predation by introduced mammals. Fewer than 5,000 are thought to remain in isolated beech forests. In March 2003, 39 Mohua were introduced to the predator-free Codfish Island (Whenua Hou) and since then, the birds have had a very successful breeding season. Meanwhile, the Department of Conservation is intensively trapping stoats and rats at two of the Mohua's strongholds in the Hawdon and Hurunui valleys on the mainland.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2004), 26(2), 4.

New Zealand fisheries heavily criticized by consumer guide

The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society has launched the first independent guide to rank the ecological sustainability of New Zealand's commercial marine fisheries. The *Best Fish Guide* ranks fisheries in three categories: Green are relatively well managed with low habitat damage and/or bycatch; Amber are where there are concerns about the status of stocks, fishing methods, habitat damage, management, bycatch or lack of knowledge; and Red

are where the fishery has a lot of problems because it is overfished, poorly managed, has high bycatch, damages marine habitats and/or there is a lack of knowledge. The guide shows that 23 of New Zealand's 62 fisheries kill significant numbers of seabirds, 50 cause habitat damage and all but two are responsible for adverse ecological effects. The worst offenders are fisheries involving orange roughy, hoki and oreos, species that are exported worldwide.

Source: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/06/fish_guide.html

Good news for the kiwi

Private individuals, particularly land-owners have joined in the fight to protect the North Island brown kiwi in the Bay of Islands in New Zealand. In the greater Bay of Islands alone, nearly 10,000 ha of privately owned land is now managed for kiwi. The construction of a predator-proof fence and the systematic trapping and killing of invasive species has reduced the number of predators on the 2,500 ha Russell Peninsula. Enhancing kiwi habitat helps other species as well. On the Russell Peninsula brown teal, little blue penguins, New Zealand dotterel and weka are thriving.

Source: *Forest & Bird* (2004), 312, 9.

Albatross petition aims for 100,000 signatories

The New Zealand conservation organization, Forest and Bird, is aiming for over 100,000 signatories on its Save the Albatross petition that was due to be presented to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization in June 2004. The petition calls for the end to pirate fishing that kills albatrosses. Forest and Bird and its English partner, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, gathered 24,000 signatories in a single week.

Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation News* (2004), 134, 2.

Net ban benefits endangered dolphin

There are estimated to be only 114 remaining endangered Maui's dolphin and they all live within four nautical miles of the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand, from New Plymouth to just south of Hokianga. Since 2003 there has been a regional ban on amateur and commercial net setting within four nautical miles of the coast. A survey during the summer of 2003–2004 shows the importance of retaining this ban. A second survey was scheduled to begin in July 2004 to see whether the dolphins use the same area in winter.

The survey also showed that it was possible to gather reliable information about the dolphin population without resorting to invasive techniques such as using satellite tags, methods that have concerned animal welfare groups.

Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation News* (2004), 134, 2.

Seabirds will benefit from new Action Plans

New Zealand and the Falkland Islands have adopted new National Plans of Action for Seabirds that will benefit species across the Southern Ocean. In the Falkland Islands, its plan was drafted by Falklands Conservation in collaboration with the UK-based Royal Society for the Protection of Birds under the guidelines of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. This plan will benefit the long-term survival of seabirds such as the black-browed albatross, 70% of whose global breeding population is found in the Falklands. The entire offshore commercial fishing fleet in the Falkland Islands is now covered by detailed plans to reduce seabird mortalities. In New Zealand, the new plan will cover all seabirds affected by commercial and non-commercial fishing methods but there are concerns that the plan's emphasis on voluntary mitigation measures will still mean that thousands of albatrosses and petrels are needlessly killed each year.

Source: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/04/seabird_npoa.html

Rare parrot survives killer bacterium

The kakapo from New Zealand is one of the world's rarest parrots. The species had been saved from extinction after years of conservation efforts. However, a deadly bacterium killed three captive birds and threatened to wipe out the remaining 83 birds living in the wild. It was thought that the bacterium was being transmitted by conservation staff handling birds as part of the captive breeding programme. In July 2004 the kakapo was given the all-clear after a recovery team intervened to stop the spread of the erysipelas infection. It is now thought that the infection was being spread by seabird carcasses rather than humans.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 183(2457), 4.

Concern over tourism in Antarctica

Australian concerns over the impact of increased tourism in Antarctica were

raised at the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting of Experts held in Norway in May 2004. In the past decade the number of tourist boats operating in Antarctica has risen from 12 to 47 and in 2003 over 20,000 ship-based tourists visited the continent. There is evidence that tourism in Antarctica will continue to increase. Amongst other things, Australia has proposed an accreditation scheme to encourage adherence to a voluntary code of conduct and codes of behaviour for visiting tourists. There are also suggestions that the International Maritime Organization encourages appropriate environmental and safety standards for commercial shipping in the Antarctic Treaty area.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 48(9–10), 814–815.

Russian plans to drill into Lake Vostok are condemned

Lake Vostok lies about 4,000 m below the surface of Antarctica and is thought to have been isolated for c. 20 million years. A Russian plan to drill into the lake has met with international condemnation. There are concerns that the equipment that will be used has not been properly tested and that it could contaminate the potentially unique ecosystems that inhabit Vostok's 5,400 km³ of water. It is thought that organisms in the lake could shed light on both early life on earth and the possibility of life existing on other icy planets. The Russian team plan to extend a 3.5 km borehole that already exists at their Vostok station. Scientists point out that this borehole already contains c. 60 m³ of kerosene, added to stop the drill freezing, which is contaminated with surface microbes. The lake water, which is at about 400 atm, could explode into the borehole.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 430(6999), 494.

The *Briefly* section in this issue was written and compiled by Simon Mickleburgh and Martin Fisher, with additional contributions from Camila Iturra, Jo Mew, Anthony Rylands and Ryan C.J. Walker. Contributions from authoritative published sources (including web sites) are always welcome. Please send contributions to Martin Fisher, Fauna & Flora International, Great Eastern House, Tenison Road, Cambridge, CB1 2TT, UK, or by e-mail to oryx@fauna-flora.org