

FFPS news

The Oryx 100% Fund

Grants awarded

At its meeting on 7 June the FFPS Council approved funding for the following projects.

£800 for a project focusing on conservation of forest birds in Vietnam. The team consists of three people from the UK and two from Vietnam, who will carry out surveys to discover good populations of Vietnamese pheasant *Lophura hatinhensis* and Edward's pheasant *L.edwardsi* in areas suitable for protection as part of a five-year agreement with the Government of Vietnam. The team will also carry out preliminary surveys for orange-necked partridge *Arborophila davidi*, green peafowl *Pavo muticus* and Germain's peacock-pheasant *Polyplecton germaini*. All these birds are considered to be threatened (Project number 89/24/9).

£500 for the Aberdeen University Expedition to Madagascar 1989. The objective is to study the status and feeding and roosting habits of the sucker-footed bat *Myzopoda aurita* in the Reserve Integrale de Marojejy in north-east Madagascar. The bat is the only species of the Myzopodidae, which is the only family of bats endemic to Madagascar. Only a few specimens have ever been found and it is considered to be very rare. The Marojejy reserve is promising because an expedition from Cambridge caught one of these bats in 1988 (Project number 89/20/7).

£300 to the Glasgow University Exploration Society Trinidad and Tobago Expedition 1989 for its effort to help the Buccoo Reef Conservation Project off south-western Tobago. The four principal areas of work will be: surveying areas of reef damaged by over-exploitation by tourism; experimental transplantation of living corals; monitoring coral growth *in situ* using a new technique; and integrating tourism with coral reef conservation (Project number 89/17/6).

£300 to the Glasgow University Exploration Society Trinidad and Tobago Expedition 1989 for work on two forest projects. One of these will focus on habitat evaluation and population monitoring of forest birds and mammals, and determination of the status of bird species under

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threat from the cage-bird trade in Trinidad. The second will be concerned with forest regeneration on the Tobago Main Ridge, which was devastated by Hurricane Flora in 1965. The team will assess natural regeneration and compare it with growth in areas replanted with fast-growing exotic species to combat erosion. The results should be of wide interest in the Caribbean where forests are ever prone to hurricane damage (Project number 89/22/8).

£300 for the University of East Anglia Comoro Islands Expedition 1989. One British and three Comorian people will reassess the status of Livingstone's giant fruit bat *Pteropus livingstonii* following cyclone Calasanji in January 1989. The team will also census the rare Grand Comoro scops owl *Otus pauliani* and the mongoose lemur *Lemur mongoz*. Conservation recommendations and the possibility of a breeding programme for *P. livingstonii* will be discussed with the government and development bodies (Project number 89/25/10).

£100 towards the preparation of a display. Threatened Molluscs of the World, which will focus on taxa listed in the *IUCN Invertebrate Red Data Book* and the *IUCN Red List*. The exhibition will make its first appearance at the 10th International Malacological Congress in Tubingen, FRG in August 1989 and will be used subsequently to raise awareness of the problems facing at least 1000 species of threatened molluscs (Project number 89/12/5).

Reports received

UEA/ICBP St Lucia Expedition (Project number 86/63/19)

A team from the International Council for Bird Preservation and the University of East Anglia worked on St Lucia, West Indies, for two months in 1987, studying six of the island's bird species. Particular emphasis was placed on the four least-known species—white-breasted thrasher *Ramphocinclus brachyurus*, St Lucia wren *Troglodytes aedon mesoleucus*, St Lucia nightjar *Caprimulgus otiosus* and Semper's warbler *Leucopezia semperi*. In addition observations were made on the St Lucia oriole *Icterus laudabilis* and St Lucia blackfinch *Melanospiza richardsoni*.

The white-breasted thrasher, which occurs elsewhere only on Martinique where there are 40 pairs, was found to be restricted to narrow bands of riverine forest where a maximum of 58 pairs was counted. This largely sedentary species is threatened by habitat destruction and fragmentation. The St Lucia wren and St Lucia nightjar were found in low densities in the north-east coastal area of the island where they are probably threatened by introduced predators such as mongooses and rats. The team failed to find Semper's warbler, which is endemic to St Lucia and had been seen only four times since 1934, the last in 1972. The two other birds, St Lucia oriole and St Lucia blackfinch, both endemic species, were found to be not uncommon and neither is currently considered threatened.

The report makes conservation recommendations for these birds, in particular the white-breasted thrasher, for which one of the least disturbed valleys, Ravine la Chaloupe, should be declared a nature reserve as soon as possible. It is also suggested that riverine vegetation in general should be given legal protection.

Vietnam Forest Project: Pheasant Survey 1988 (Project number 87/39/15)

The principal aim of this project was to assist the Vietnamese Government with its new protected area programme by: conducting surveys of threatened pheasants and other forest species in a selection of proposed reserves; assisting with training of staff from the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources; and developing a long-term strategy for pheasant conservation in Vietnam.

The team was in Vietnam for three months and visits to six forest sites provided a wealth of information on the condition of the forests and their avifauna. Valuable information was obtained on the status of Vietnamese pheasant *Lophura hatinhensis* and crested argus *Rheinardia ocellata* at all principal localities, but the area visited to search for Edward's pheasant *Lophura edwardsi* proved to be unsuitable. A great deal of new distribution data were collected on Vietnamese birds and these preliminary surveys will provide a sound basis for a follow-up visit.

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Cambridge Columbus Zoological Expedition to Venezuela 1988 (Project number 88/15/5)

The Paria Peninsula in Venezuela has long been recognized as one of South America's centres of endemism. Being the easternmost range of mountains in the Venezuelan Coastal Cordillera and isolated from the rest of the highland region by low-lying land, it is an 'island' of montane habitat.

The four-person team studied the birds of the eastern end of the peninsula by conducting a census along a 1.5-km wide transect stretching from 535 m above sea level to the summit of Cerro el Ovido at 885 m. They recorded 89 species, but failed to find the red siskin *Carduelis cucullata*, which is highly endangered because of the wild bird trade. This species appears to be no longer present on Paria and its numbers in central Venezuela have declined to such an extent that few are being caught there now. The team assessed the status of the endemic taxa, some of which are endangered or vulnerable through loss of habitat, but further work is needed to evaluate the extent of habitat loss in the area.

The dragonfly fauna of the peninsula is poorly known and the team sought to improve this by conducting a dragonfly survey. Of a total of 31 species recorded two are endemic to the eastern Coastal Cordillera, one of which is previously undescribed. The team also produced a butterfly list of 90 for the area.

University of East Anglia Comoro Islands Expedition (Project number 88/37/18)

Many fruit bats of the genus *Pteropus* are under threat and are the focus of an action plan initiated by the Chiroptera Specialist Group and currently co-ordinated by Simon Mickleburgh at FFPS. In line with the upsurge in interest in *Pteropus* spp conservation and in view of the success of the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust's captive-breeding and conservation project for the Rodrigues fruit bat *Pteropus rodricensis*, the expedition selected *P. livingstonii* as a target for research.

The primary aim of this expedition was to assess the population status and habitat requirements of

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this fruit bat, which is endemic to the Comoro Islands in the western Indian Ocean. The last known survey was carried out in 1975 and 1977 when the species was found only on the islands of Anjouan and Moheli with a total population of no more than a few hundred, threatened by active and progressive deforestation.

In July and August 1988 the expedition visited three of the Comoro Islands and systematically surveyed them for *P. livingstonii*. The fourth island, Mayotte, was not visited due to financial and time restrictions, and also as it has no suitable habitat. The team saw no *P. livingstonii* on Grand Comore, but the forest on Mt Karthala is extensive and difficult to survey, so there is still a slight possibility that the species occurs there. The bat certainly exists above 600 m on Anjouan and the team estimated a maximum population of 200. It is vulnerable because it is restricted to remaining primary forest on the steepest slopes, which is prone to cyclone damage. Moheli yielded no sightings of the species. This island was struck by two severe cyclones in 1980 and 1983 and this, coupled with the loss of 53 per cent of primary forest between 1973 and 1983, may have drastically reduced the population.

Although the remaining areas of forest on Anjouan and Moheli are unlikely to disappear in the near future, the team recommends that an *ex-situ* captive breeding population be established to safeguard the species. Further research is also needed and the report concludes that the future of the bat, its forest habitat and the other species that live there, depends upon a whole spectrum of measures that need to be implemented to ensure sustainable development for the Comores.

FFPS Flora Project

Following closely from its work on exposing the large-scale trade in wild-collected bulbs (*Oryx*, 23, 127–34), FFPS has now begun working towards solutions that incorporate the artificial propagation of endangered bulbs on a small-scale rural basis in the countries of origin. Funds are currently being sought to launch the Indigenous Propagation Project, initially to be focused on Turkey. A supporter in the US has already generously provided start up funds of \$6000. The Society's consultant botanist, Mike Read, FFPS news

and chairman of the Flora Committee, Barry Thomas, met with representatives of the European Community on 25 July to open discussions and approaches are to be made elsewhere.

ICBP/FFPS Conservation Expedition Competition 1990

Following the success of this year's competition ICBP and FFPS are now inviting university teams planning an expedition with a wildlife conservation objective to enter the 1990 competition. Teams must be of university students planning an expedition overseas in 1990. There are four prizes in two categories: birds (£1000 and £800) and all other wild animals and plants (£1000 and £800). Guidelines for applicants are available from ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0PJ or FFPS, 79–83 North Street, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 1ZA.

Scimitar-horned oryx in Tunisia

In December 1985, ten scimitar-horned oryx *Oryx dammah* from Marwell and Edinburgh Zoos in the UK were released into Bou-Hedma National Park in Tunisia. They have been monitored regularly since then and in December 1988 the FFPS contributed £1900 towards a sixth visit by a London Zoo researcher.

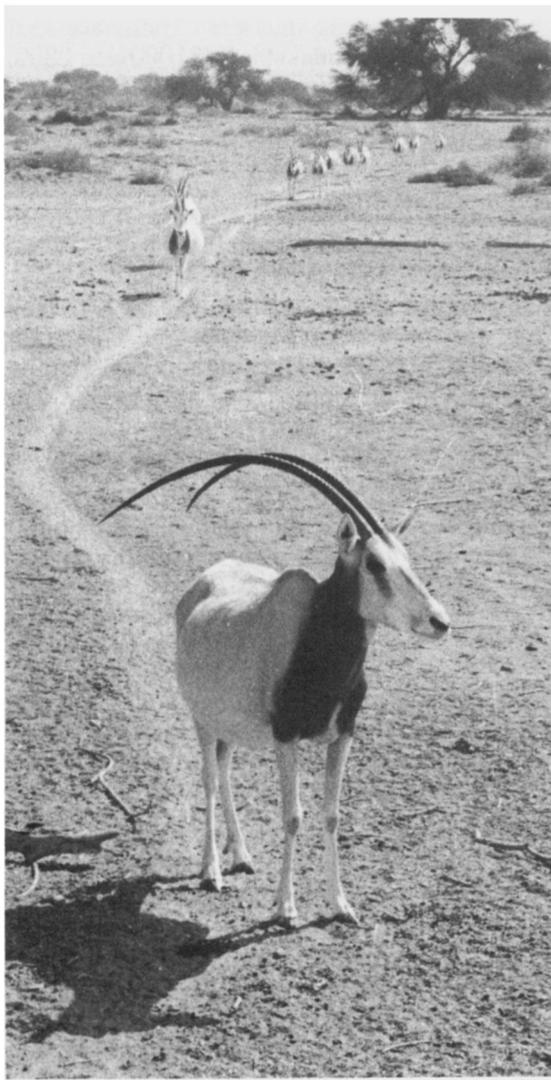
Its purpose was to monitor the health and breeding success of the herd and to remove the dominant male. This animal had killed three male addax *Addax nasomaculatus* and was considered to be aberrantly aggressive, even to males of his own species. As a short-term solution the Direction des Forêts had built a fence to divide the park into two, separating the addax in the east from the oryx in the west, but this was not a satisfactory long-term solution.

Removing this male will probably prove beneficial in other ways. A pedigree analysis of the ten reintroduced animals has shown that they are all closely related and preventing the male from breeding with his daughters should help keep inbreeding levels low. The male now likely to assume dominance is not so closely related to the adult females and their offspring.

The herd now contains 14 animals, with four calves having been born, and their health

appears to be good as judged by general observation and by more detailed examination of four tranquillized animals.

Future management of the herd is now being discussed and, taking genetic considerations into account, it would be unwise to allow the current herd to be the sole founders of the park's future oryx population. The first step will be to bring in new females, preferably unrelated animals, probably from the USA, which would become integrated into the existing herd.



Scimitar-horned Oryx.

Members' meetings

Details of London meetings, held at the Zoological Society of London's meeting rooms, are given in the insert in this issue of *Oryx*.

Some local group meetings are listed below; others are also being arranged, but full details were not available when going to press. For information about additional meetings please write to the address given for each group, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Bristol and the West of England Group

Ian Redmond, c/o BBC Wildlife Magazine, Broadcasting House, Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 2LR.

Cambridge Group

24 November 1989. 'Wildlife Gardening: Both Sides of the Fence' with Chris Baines. Buffet supper with wine, 6.00 pm, £3.00, prebooked tickets only. The talk is free and starts at 7.30 pm.

22 February 1990. 'The Enchanted Canopy' with Andrew Mitchell. A special Ethiopian meal will be served at 6.00 pm, £4.50, prebooked tickets only. The talk is free and starts at 7.30 pm.

The venue for both meetings is the Department of Zoology, Downing Street, Cambridge and tickets are available from Dr C. Harcourt, 70 Victoria Road, Cambridge CB4 3DU.

Edinburgh Group

16 November 1989 at 7.30 pm. An illustrated talk, joint with Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh — 'Destruction, Conservation and Utilization of the Amazon Rain Forest' by Professor G. T. Prance, Director, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in the Lecture Theatre, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh.

Roger Wheeler, Edinburgh Zoo, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 6TS.

North-West Group

Nick Ellerton, Chester Zoo, Caughall Road, Upton, Chester CH2 1LH.

Oxford Group

David MacDonald, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS.