

INTERNATIONAL

CITES update

Swaziland acceded to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) on 26 February. This came into force on 27 May making it the 136th Party to the convention.

Source: Jonathan Barzdo, CITES, 16 April 1997.

Biodiversity hotspots

A new global biodiversity map lists 17 priority areas that are recommended for conservation attention. Each was determined by the number of endemic species and the degree of threat – at least 1 per cent of vascular plants are endemic and less than 25 per cent of original habitat remains. The areas are: the Tropical Andes (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia); Madagascar; Cape and Western Cape floristic region (South Africa); the Antilles; Western Sunda region (Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei); the Philippines; the Atlantic Forest (Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina); Brazil's Cerrado; the Darien (Panama); the Chocó (Colombia, Ecuador) and West Ecuador; Meso-American forests; Polynesia and Micronesian Island complex; Southwestern Australia; the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka; New Caledonia; the Guinean forests of West Africa. Almost 40 per cent of terrestrial plants and 25 per cent of terrestrial vertebrate species are endemic to these areas, which occupy less than 2 per cent of the earth's land surface.

Source: Conservation International, 13 February 1997.

Agreement on dams

In April, at a workshop in Geneva sponsored by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the World Bank, dam-builders and their critics agreed to work together to review the development effectiveness of large dams and to establish internationally accepted standards that would improve the assessment, planning, building, operating and financing of these projects. The workshop brought together more than 35 experts from international organizations, governments, private businesses, non-governmental organizations and people affected by dams. Participants agreed that investments in dams should go ahead only when they are socially, environmentally and economically sustainable.

Source: World Bank, 11 April 1997.

Efforts to safeguard bears

The CITES Animals Committee, in recognition of the serious threat to bear conservation from the illegal trade in bear parts and derivatives, has directed the CITES Secretariat to collect all available information on bears, and trade in bear parts and derivatives from all range states and all countries involved in the trade. In February two initiatives were launched in the USA to help save the world's bears. Conservation groups filed a petition with the US Department of Interior calling for an official investigation into South Korea's role in the bear-parts trade with a view to certifying South Korea under the 1974 Pelly Amendment if it were found to be transgressing international agreements to conserve species. Certification can result in trade

restrictions against a country. Second, a bill before Congress would, if it is passed, prohibit the import, export and interstate commerce in bear gall bladders and bile in the USA. Sources: *BBC Wildlife*, April 1997, 54; *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, March 1997, 84.

Medicinal plants threatened

The growing international demand for herbal teas and medicines is threatening some species of plants with extinction. A new study identifies 18 species that need urgent protection. Chinese ginseng and the maidenhair tree *Ginkgo biloba* were found to have the largest markets and trade is continuing to grow. The American demand has endangered several South Asian medicinal plants such as the Indian yew *Taxus wallichiana*, whose bark is sold to treat ovarian and other cancers. Trade in medicinal plants does not always have detrimental effects on the environment, as demonstrated by the sustainable production of witch hazel, made from the bark and leaves of the American shrub *Hamamelis virginiana*.

Source: *New Scientist*, 15 February 1997, 6.

New council for whalers

A new pro-whaling organization, the World Whalers Council, is to be set up to represent the interests of whalers in Japan, Norway and the USA, and may involve whalers from Iceland and Russia. Increasing numbers of whales are killed every year, despite the indefinite moratorium on commercial whaling, and it is likely that the organization will focus on the resumption of large-scale international trade in whale meat, currently prohibited by the Convention on International Trade in

Endangered Species (CITES). Norway has put forward a proposal to the CITES meeting in June, to 'downlist' minke whales *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* in the North Atlantic, allowing international trade. Japan has put forward downlisting proposals for minke whales in the North Pacific and the Southern Ocean, Bryde's whale *Balaenoptera edeni* in the North Pacific and the Californian grey whale *Eschrichtius robustus*. Japan is also hosting two International Whaling Commission workshops this spring to examine Japan's proposed community-based coastal whaling and its programme of scientific whaling. Source: BBC Wildlife, April 1997, 53.

Reducing the impact of oil development

A policy paper, *Reinventing the Well: Approaches to Minimizing the Environmental and Social Impact of Oil Development in the Tropics*, has been produced by Conservation International. New technologies now exist that can minimize the impact of oil development in sensitive ecosystems, and early evaluation of social impacts and a formal mechanism to consult with local communities, governments, private groups and other stakeholders are recommended. Oil development can result in land clearance, air pollution, water contamination, soil erosion, sedimentation and disturbance of habitat and wildlife. Indirect impacts may also threaten wildlife when forest areas are opened up by roads and pipelines. Source: Conservation International, 3 February 1997.

Briefly is compiled by
Catharine Baden-Daintree
e-mail: info@fauna-flora.org

EUROPE

Action for threatened species

A co-ordinated European Action Programme on Threatened Species (EUROSPECIES) was proposed at a meeting in Strasbourg in September 1996. It will form part of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, endorsed in October 1995. EUROSPECIES will combine the work of governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to reverse the decline in numbers and distribution of wild species of flora and fauna and to promote concerted European action for species insufficiently protected by habitat conservation measures, illegal taking and trade. Source: Naturopa Newsletter: Special issue on Bern Convention, 1996.

Measures to stop desertification

Iceland has launched a 5-year soil conservation programme to prevent pasture land becoming eroded to form desert. Overgrazing of wind-swept pastures by sheep and horses during the brief summer causes dust storms, soil erosion and the formation of cold deserts. The source of the problem lies in deforestation. Source: New Scientist, 15 March 1997, 11.

Cod near to collapse

Models predict that overfishing in the North Sea is depleting cod at a rate that may result in collapse. If fishing continues at its current pace only 4 per cent of 1-year-old fish will survive to maturity. A substantial

reduction in the rate of fishing is required to prevent a fishing disaster. European Union reductions in the total allowable catch may not be sufficient, allowing about 60 per cent of the cod to be taken annually. A reduction to at least 40 per cent is recommended by a research team of the Scottish Office's Marine Laboratory. In December the European Commission omitted to impose severe cuts in fishing quotas because stocks had recovered in some areas after favourable weather. There is concern that the situation may be comparable to that of the Canadian Grand Banks fishery, which collapsed 4 years ago and as yet shows little sign of recovery despite a moratorium on fishing. Source: New Scientist, 8 February 1997, 6.

Bohemian-bred rhinos

Czech scientists are hoping to establish an open-air breeding station for rhinoceroses at a former Soviet military base in Bohemia. The Ralsko military base, now a nature reserve, with its mixture of meadow and woodland with plentiful freshwater, would provide good habitat for rhino. The region has relatively mild winters, although heated 'pavilions' would be necessary for cold spells. Captive breeding for rhinos has had limited success in European zoos and greater living areas for larger breeding populations have been recommended. The project will focus on the southern white rhino *Ceratotherium simum*, although future work may involve the more endangered northern subspecies of white rhino *C. s. cottoni*. Source: New Scientist, 5 April 1997, 11.

Cetaceans killed

Fishermen have been implicated in the deaths of hundreds of cetaceans that were washed ashore by storms on the Atlantic coast of the Bay of Biscay during February and March this year. A study of 197 animals revealed that 74 per cent were the victims of fishery by-catch; the cause of death could not be determined for the remaining 26 per cent. The majority of the animals studied were common dolphins *Delphinus delphis*; others included striped dolphins *Stenella coeruleoalba*, bottlenose dolphins *Tursiops truncatus*, harbour porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*, fin whales *Balaenoptera physalus*, beaked whales *Mesoplodon mirus*, pilot whales *Globicephala melaena* and minke whales *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*. Many showed injuries consistent with being trapped in nets and a few may have been killed for meat. France and Spain are signatories to cetacean-protection agreements set up under the Bonn Convention, which call on members to implement 'by-catch mitigation measures'. Source: *BBC Wildlife*, May 1997, 59–60.

New national park

The Republic of Austria and the provinces of Lower Austria and Vienna have signed a contract that will safeguard the future of the Danube alluvial lands. Donau-Auen, Austria's fourth national park, covers 9300 ha and it is hoped that the area will be progressively enlarged to 11,500 ha. The economic exploitation of this area will end and indigenous trees will be planted to return the forest to its natural state. River dynamics will be improved by reconnecting

separated branches and transforming ponds into flowing side branches.

Source: *Nature and National Parks*, 35 (135), 1997, 25–26.

New Romanian hunting laws

The Romanian Parliament's new law on hunting and game protection came into force on 27 October 1996. The law will regulate the number of species that can be hunted and the hunting season for various game species.

Source: *Birdlife in Europe*, March 1997, 4.

New site for rare frog

A new site for the Italian agile frog *Rana latastei* has been discovered in Slovenia at the eastern edge of its range. A newly formed society for the study and protection of Slovenian flora and fauna, DPPVN, discovered the site, an area of deciduous forest on a flood plain that is threatened by agricultural improvements and drainage.

Source: *Froglog*, August 1996, 1.

Iberian bat decline

A brief revision of the current status of bats on the Iberian Peninsula in Spain, has concluded that 22 out of 25 species are threatened and three of these are in danger of extinction: Mehely's horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus mehelyi*, the long-fingered bat *Myotis capaccinii* and Bechstein's bat *Myotis bechsteinii*. Several factors are involved in the decline, including the destruction of refuges and habitat, reduction of food sources, poisoning by pesticides and other chemicals, and disturbance and intentional killing by humans.

Source: *Quercus*, February 1997, 18–22.

NORTH EURASIA

Warbler's habitat threatened

A study of aquatic warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* populations in Belorussia, the Ukraine and Lithuania has found that much of the birds' habitat is threatened by water-table changes, drainage and abandonment of hand-scythed sedge meadows. Belorussia was found to have a total breeding population of 6700–9700 males, nearly half the known world population. In the Ukraine a new warbler population was found at the Supoi valley, East Kiev – the most isolated and most eastern recorded population – and 300–400 males were found at 20 sites in Lithuania.

Source: *BirdLife in Europe*, March 1997, 1 & 2.

Fishing ban for Caspian Sea

A protocol agreement has been signed by fishing industry leaders from Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan to ban open-sea fishing for sturgeon in the Caspian Sea. From 1 January 1997 fishing will be permitted only in the lower reaches of the Volga and Ural rivers and regular raids will be carried out to catch poachers. Iran is also reported to support these initiatives.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, March 1997, 85.

Grasslands recover but forests still at risk

A decline in agriculture in remote areas of the former Soviet Union since the end of communist rule has allowed the Russian Steppes, the

world's largest zone of natural grassland, to recover after decades of farming. The steppe once covered over 6000 sq km but agricultural activity this century has left only about 5 per cent undamaged. Grasses are now invading the disused fields. The future looks less promising for other areas in the former Soviet Union, however, and it has been estimated that almost a quarter of habitats are threatened. The pine forests, and jasmine and juniper woods in the Crimea, the lily swamps of the River Volga delta, and the walnut and apple forests on the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan are all at risk. There is also growing concern over the destruction of larch and pine forests in Siberia and broadleaved forests in the Soviet Far East by Japanese and North American logging companies, and by road building. *Source: BBC Wildlife*, April 1997, 55.

New zapovedniki

Two strict scientific nature reserves, zapovedniki, have been created in Russia, bringing the total to 95. Gydanski Nature Reserve occupies the northern part of Gydanski Peninsula and some of the off-shore waters and islands of the Kara Sea. It has a total area of 878,000 ha and protects a unique area of high-arctic habitat. The Bastak Zapovednik, in the upper reaches of Bastak River in the Far East, will protect 91,000 ha of mountainous coniferous forest and cedar-pine stands. *Source: Russian Conservation News*, Winter 1997, 5.

Action against financier

The Pacific Environment and Resources Center (PERC) has filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit against the Overseas

Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) – an American government agency that provides political risk insurance and financing to selected US international ventures – for failing to disclose environmental impact analyses and other documents associated with forestry and mining ventures in Siberia and the Far East. The OPIC, a major financier of international resource extraction projects in Russia, including mining ventures and logging projects in the pristine forests of the Russian Far East, refuses to grant advance notice of its projects, preventing any public debate. The lawsuit is part of PERC's world-wide strategy to make finance agencies such as OPIC more accountable to the public. They are calling for environmental impact analyses to be available in draft form to allow public review and comment prior to decision-making. *Source: Russian Conservation News*, Winter 1997, 12–13.

NORTH AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

Enthusiasts threaten owl

A survey of the African marsh owl *Asio capensis* in Morocco has revealed new threats to this endangered bird. In addition to habitat loss, the marsh owl is being disturbed by European bird-watchers who are guided to nesting sites in the Moulay-Bousselham area by local people. The survey has also confirmed the presence of a well established egg-stealing network, with eggs being sold to European collectors. Without urgent conservation measures the future for this bird may be uncertain. *Source: Quercus*, February 1997, 12–14.

Egyptian markets raided

The Egyptian authorities have conducted their first raids on markets under the 1994 Egyptian Environmental Law. The tourist bazaar in Kerdassa, west of Cairo, which sells skins and stuffed animals, was targeted at the end of last year, and the animal market at Tuni, south of the capital, was raided in January. Large quantities of illegal merchandise were confiscated including skins and horns from endangered species such as the Dorcas gazelle *Gazella dorcas* and the Nubian ibex *Capra ibex* as well as large numbers of stuffed animals, many protected under Egyptian law. The raid at Tuni yielded numerous live animals and birds including owls, raptors, snakes and lizards. Two-hundred and thirty live Egyptian tortoises *Testudo kleinmanni* – a species listed on Appendix 1 of the CITES – were confiscated. All healthy animals were released into suitable habitat and those requiring treatment were sent to a rehabilitation centre. It is hoped that the tortoises, which were in a poor condition, will be used as part of a captive breeding and reintroduction programme in the Zaranik Protected Area in North Sinai. Further targets are being discussed as part of a continuous process of enforcement. *Source: BBC Wildlife*, April 1997, 52.

Wild ostriches breed in Saudi Arabia

For the first time in over 40 years wild ostriches have bred successfully in the Arabian Peninsula. In February and March a number of ostrich chicks hatched in the acacia savannah of the 2200-sq-km

Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area in central Saudi Arabia. This represents the first breeding by free-ranging ostriches in the Arabian Peninsula since the extinction of the Arabian ostrich subspecies *Struthio camelus syriacus* in the 1950s. The Sudanese red-necked ostrich *S. c. camelus*, the Arabian ostrich's nearest living relative, was introduced into Saudi Arabia by the National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, to fill the niche left by the Arabian ostrich. Captive-bred ostriches were released in Mahazat as-Sayd in 1994 and 13 birds became established. Four nests were found this year and hatching at two of these produced four and nine chicks from clutches of 13 and 33 eggs, respectively. New sites are being prepared for release of more ostriches in the extreme north and south of Saudi Arabia, in the Harrat al-Harrah and 'Uruq Bani Ma'arid protected areas. The work is part of a programme to restore the wildlife of Saudi Arabia. Source: Philip J. Seddon, National Wildlife Research Center, National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

New reserve for Bahrain

The government of Bahrain has designated the Hawar Islands in the Arabian Gulf a nature reserve. The 16 islands are home to the world's largest breeding colony of socotra cormorants *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*, and dugongs *Dugong dugon* and green turtles *Chelonia mydas* feed on the surrounding seagrass beds. Source: BBC Wildlife, May 1997, 64.



Ostriches *Struthio camelus camelus* with chicks in the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected Area, central Saudi Arabia (NWRC Photo Library).

Siberian cranes in Iran

Only 10 Siberian cranes *Grus leucogeranus* wintered in Iran this winter, including three juveniles and the adult male to which a satellite radio was attached last year.

Source: *The ICF Bugle*, February 1997, 7.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Bushmeat threat for elephants

Recent evidence from East and Central Africa suggests that the commercial trade in wild elephant meat is becoming increasingly profitable. In the urban markets of Central Africa there is now an almost unlimited demand for fresh and smoked bushmeat – a trade that is also threatening chimpanzees and gorillas. Nearly 300 elephants were killed on one occasion in northern Congo last December. Many were stripped of flesh as well as their tusks. In Kenya last April 19 elephants were killed for their meat in the Turkana district. Some

conservationists have already predicted an increase in poaching resulting from proposals to allow a limited trade in ivory, submitted to CITES by Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe. This may be further exacerbated by the demand for bushmeat. Source: BBC Wildlife, April 1997, 53.

Nakuru dries up

Lake Nakuru in Kenya, famous for flamingos that once numbered as many as one-and-a-half million, is drying up. The bird's food supply has diminished and there has been a huge reduction in birds at the lake. Many are thought to have gone elsewhere to feed and the flamingos numbered only 3000 in January. The dry-out may be a normal, cyclical process but there is concern that the frequency and duration of the dry-outs could be increasing because of global climate change. Deforestation may also be contributing to the problem, causing rivers to flood in the rainy season and lakes to recess in the dry season. Between 1970 and 1986 400 sq km of

forest were cut down in the lake's catchment area. A project to minimize the impact of agriculture has been initiated, encouraging farmers to integrate trees with their crops.

Source: *Swara*, September/October 1996, 21–22.

Dugongs in danger

The future of a small population of dugongs *Dugong dugon*, located off the coast of Kenya, looks increasing bleak. During an aerial survey in March 1996 only six individuals were sighted within the entire Kenyan range. Past records indicate that the dugongs of East Africa have declined dramatically in recent years – a herd of 80 individuals was sighted in 1966, while in 1994 aerial surveys reported only 10. Harvesting by local people for meat, medicine and ivory, accidental capture in fishing nets, habitat loss, and disturbance by boats, trawling and pollution have all contributed to this species's decline. The dugongs have also become more vulnerable to predation by tiger sharks when they move into deeper water to avoid the dangers of in-shore waters. A task force has been formed, under the stewardship of the Kenya Wildlife Service, to design and implement plans to rescue the dugong. A stronger African population can be found off the coast of Mozambique and it is hoped that they can interbreed.

Source: *Swara*, September/October 1996, 13.

Fish vital for corals

An 8-year study of threats to coral reefs has shown that fish can help reduce the detrimental effects of sedimentation and pollution and that overfishing is the most threatening human

influence on reef ecosystems. Scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society and the University of Miami, working at Malindi National Park and Watuma in Kenya, surveyed the coral reefs, where fishing is banned, and compared the effects of sedimentation. The researchers found that despite high levels of sedimentation at Malindi coral cover remained constant. The abundant herbivorous fish prevented algae from increasing and smothering the corals. The scientists also found that overfished coral reefs were in a much poorer condition than polluted ones, which were frequently dominated by sea urchins that erode reefs by grazing.

Restoration of polluted reefs could be possible by allowing the recovery of populations of grazing fish. Removal of sea urchins in heavily fished sites could also help.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, February 1997, 8.

Safe crossing for colobus

Arboreal rope bridges have been built to enable black-and-white colobus monkeys *Colobus angolensis* to cross the Diani Beach Road that runs through their habitat in Kenya. In 2 months 17 monkeys from the population of 200 were killed by motorists while attempting to cross the road. The Diani Forest is one of the last strongholds for the Angolan colobus in East Africa and road kills are having a serious impact on the small population.

Source: *Swara*, November 1996/February 1997, 56; and *BBC Wildlife*, May 1997, 61.

Farming affects ostriches

In Tanzania there is increasing concern that the rise in ostrich farming has led to a decline in

native populations of the wild Masai ostrich *Struthio camelus massaicus*. For several years a reduction in the number of young ostriches has been noticed throughout their range. Ostrich farms were established in the area in 1990 in order to breed and export the birds to the US and Europe, where the meat is becoming popular. The farms are unregulated and unsustainable egg-collection, abuses of export licenses and poor conditions for the birds are common. Farms may also be removing young ostriches and eggs from the wild and selling them labelled as farm-bred.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, March 1997, 63.

Cheetah translocation in Zambia

In October 1994 three wild cheetahs *Acinonyx jubatus* were released into the Lower Zambezi National Park, Zambia, by the Cheetah Translocation Project, which aims to evaluate the possibility of establishing a cheetah population in the park. The cheetahs were captured by farmers in Namibia and spent 6 weeks acclimatizing in an enclosure before release into the park, fitted with radio collars. The animals travelled south-west, covering 70 km in one month, before two were found dead in snares. The third has survived and established a home range of about 600 sq km in the park. A second phase of work is planned to commence by mid-1997.

Source: Charles M. Phiri, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Zambia, 16 December 1996.

...and in Zimbabwe

The Zambezi Society has relocated 14 wild cheetahs from farmland in Zimbabwe's

lowveld, where cheetahs are considered a problem for farmers, to create a founder population in Matusadona National Park, where the animal is rarely found. Since their release the cheetahs have established home ranges and are hunting and mating successfully – three litters of cubs have been observed.

Conservationists have recommended that no further translocations take place in the park until a full analysis of the data from this study has been carried out.

Source: *Zimbabwe Wildlife*, January–March 1997, 11.

Wild dogs listed as problem

The Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Act, revised in 1996, now erroneously lists the African hunting dog (or wild dog) *Lycaon pictus* as a 'problem animal', considered a threat to crops or livestock. This mistake may give landowners the right to destroy the dogs of which only 3000 remain in Africa, 750 of them in Zimbabwe. In 1975 the wild dog was listed as a problem animal but hunting it became illegal in a 1987 statute. The error in the 1996 revision may have arisen from someone referring to the 1975 act without realizing the subsequent change in law. Many landowners still consider the animals vermin. Dr Machena, the acting director of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management says that an amendment to correct the mistake will be in place before the CITES meeting in June.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, April 1997, 52.

Rhinoceros introduction

A white rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* born at the Serengeti

Safaripark, Hodenhagen, Germany, is being used as a pilot in a reintroduction effort in Namibia. The animal will be fitted with a radio transmitter and released after a period of acclimatization in Etosha National Park, where the species has been extinct for the whole of this century. If the experiment is successful, other rhinoceroses bred in Germany will be released.

Source: *International Zoo News*, January/February 1997, 57.

Land donations in South Africa

Two areas of land have been donated to the World-Wide Fund for Nature – South Africa. The first, an area of the Cape Peninsula, including much of the slope of Karbonkelberg on the Atlantic seaboard and Sandy Bay, one of the last undeveloped beaches on the peninsula, is an important area for biodiversity with many endemic species. It will be incorporated into a new national park. The second, the Rietvlei Wetland in the greater Cape Town metropolitan area, is an important site for migratory birds.

Source: *Our Living World*, February 1997, 4 & 8.

Sugarbush destroyed

The world's last known viable Swarveld sugarbush *Protea adorata* colony in South Africa has been destroyed by a farmer. The three or four plants were ploughed up with surrounding land for grazing despite requests to save the colony. Some seeds have been rescued by the Protea Atlas Project team.

Source: *Our Living World*, February 1997, 5.

Magpie-robin population rises

The world population of Seychelles magpie-robins *Copsychus sechellarum* now stands at 66. Birds translocated to Cousin Island in 1994 and 1995 are breeding prolifically and now number 19. In November 1996 four birds were moved to Cousine Island to join the two taken there in 1995 to establish a new breeding population. The main population on Fregate Island is largely stable.

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

Masoala Peninsula saved

A new national park has been created in Madagascar. Masoala National Park covers more than 200,000 ha of the Masoala Peninsula and is home to 85 bird species 22 mammal species and 16 different reptiles. Many species are endemic to this region, including the red-ruffed lemur *Varecia variegata ruber*, the Malagasy serpent eagle *Eutriorchis astur* and two genera of palms. A Malaysian conglomerate had hoped to log the entire north-eastern peninsula.

Source: *Conservation International*, 14 March 1997.

Lemur close to extinction

A new study of the hairy-eared dwarf lemur *Allocebus trichotis*, one of the least studied and rarest living primates, gives little hope for this elusive Madagascan species. Originally described in 1975, it is known from only four museum specimens and was thought to be extinct until 1989 when two live lemurs were found in the biosphere reserve, south of the Mananara River. The new study discovered more about

this elusive species from interviews with local people. The lemur is found in pairs in areas of primary forest and hibernates for many months either in trees or underground. It is eaten by local people, who have lemur traps throughout the forests. The human consumption of this species, in addition to the deforestation of the Mananara region, makes the long-term survival of this species increasingly doubtful. *Source: Lemur News*, July 1996, 14–15.

New whale wintering site

An important new wintering ground for humpback whales *Megaptera novaeangliae* has been identified in Baie d'Antongil, Madagascar. A survey from July to September 1996 has estimated a minimum wintering population of 80 humpback whales. Fourteen mothers were observed with newborn calves, suggesting that it is also a critical area for calving and nursing. *Source: Conservation Biology*, April 1997, 312–314.

Echo parakeets: new colonies found

Six new breeding groups of echo parakeets *Psittacula eques* have been discovered during surveys in Mauritius, bringing the number of colonies of this critically endangered endemic species to 13. *Source: World Birdwatch*, March 1997, 5.

SOUTH & SOUTH EAST ASIA

Poor law enforcement threatens lagoon

The Chillika Lagoon, one of the most important of India's wild-

life sanctuaries, is threatened by prawn farming. A ban by the Orissa High Court in 1994 has never been enforced. Chemicals used by the farmers are polluting the area and nearly 5000 fishing boats are used by prawn farmers on the lake. The Chillika Wildlife Division has submitted a proposal for the protection of the area but the development of a leisure resort at the mouth of the lake is also planned and is likely to be approved. The government may be in breach of a regulation, which states that construction is forbidden within 500 m of the high-tide line, if the plans go ahead. Illegal poaching also threatens the many species of birds found at Chillika, including 95 species of migrants such as flamingos, herons and pelicans. The park authorities want trees planted between the lake and surrounding farms to help prevent villagers, who kill nearly 30,000 birds every year, from trapping the birds. If the prawn farmers are not stopped and the resort project goes ahead the Chillika Wildlife Division will go to the Supreme Court of India for the implementation of the Orissa High Court's 1994 order and the coastal zone notification. *Source: BBC Wildlife*, May 1997, 62.

Star tortoise trade

Wildlife officials in India are trying to stop illegal exports of the star tortoise *Geochelone elegans schoepff*, which is listed on CITES Appendix II and protected under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. In September 1996, Indian forestry officials seized more than 1000 young tortoises destined for export to Singapore where they fetch more than \$US140 as pets. In November a British

national arrested by Canadian Customs officials after a flight from southern India to Toronto had 232 tortoises in his cabin luggage. One tortoise died on the journey, nine others died of dehydration soon after and approximately half the shipment needed special care before they were strong enough to be flown back to India. *Source: TRAFFIC USA*, December 1996, 13–14.

India's Siberian crane update

The flock of Siberian cranes *Grus leucogeranus* that winters in India appears to be down to three: one pair and a lone adult male arrived at the traditional wintering ground in 1996. A juvenile that the pair was believed to have raised in Siberia last summer was not with them. *Source: The ICF Bugle*, February 1997, 7.

New bird records

Blyth's tragopan *Tragopan blythii*, a globally threatened species known from very few recent records, has been discovered at new sites in Myanmar and India. Hume's pheasant *Syrmaticus humiae*, another rarely recorded threatened species, has been found in India for the first time in recent years. *Source: World Birdwatch*, March 1997, 5.

Francolin declines

Despite hunting, trapping, egg-collecting and habitat destruction, the black francolin *Francolinus francolinus* and the grey francolin *F. pondicerianus* apparently maintained their numbers in Pakistan for centuries. In the last two decades, however, their distributions and densities

appeared to have been much reduced. Preliminary findings of a 3-year investigation into the causes of the declines started in 1994 indicate that habitat conversion for agriculture is a severe problem, that heavy doses of pesticides and herbicides are used on monoculture crops, and large-scale harvesting of wheat in April and May causes nesting losses. Illegal netting of the birds occurs throughout the year for pets, as decoys for hunters, for calling and fighting competitions, and as food. In addition, the licensed hunting season is too long, illegal gun hunting is common and the Wildlife Department does not have the capacity to enforce the law.

Source: *Partridge, Quail and Francolin News*, Autumn 1996, 3-4.

Elephant increase in Bardia

The Royal Bardia National Park, Nepal, has seen a surprising increase in wild Asian elephants *Elephas maximus* in recent years. There has not been a resident elephant population in the park since 1975, with the exception of two large bulls that have been seen regularly since the mid 1980s. Several animals have been sighted entering the park recently and the total number of elephants in May/June 1995 was 41. The elephants have now dispersed into various herds in the park and there is some evidence that they might be breeding. The animals are thought to have migrated from India, possibly in search of better habitat. Little is known of the wild elephant population of Nepal and migration of herds between India and Nepal has never been studied. It is hoped that research will be carried out to discover more

about this population and devise a management plan for both migratory and resident elephants.

Source: *Gajah*, January 1997, 41-44.

Protecting the Lao PDR/Vietnam border area

At a meeting in January, Lao PDR and Vietnam agreed to work together to protect the Northern Truong Song mountain range, which includes two provinces in Lao PDR (Borikhamsai and Khammoune) and three in Vietnam (Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Quang Ninh). The area is the most important natural area in the subregion because of its high diversity of plants and animals, particularly endangered species. At the same meeting it was recommended that Vietnam's Phong Nha Nature Reserve, which is in the area, be expanded. It is believed to be the only place in the world with

healthy populations of both the douc langur *Pygathrix nemaeus* and the Ha Tinh langur *Trachypithecus francoisi hatinhensis*. Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, March 1997, 84.

Shark rediscovery

The Borneo river shark (known to science simply as 'Glyphis species B' from one museum specimen taken from an unknown river in Borneo over 100 years ago) has been rediscovered. Scientists working on an 18-month Elasmobranch Biodiversity, Conservation and Management project being carried out by the IUCN/SSC Shark Specialist Group in Sabah were shown a small shark caught by fishermen in the Kinabatangan River and preserved in formalin until the survey team arrived. The survey, which is being carried out in co-operation with the Department of Fisheries, Sabah, and with assistance



Almost certainly a new subspecies of northern Luzon slender-tail cloud rat *Phloeomys pallidus*, discovered in February 1997 by a team from University of Philippines at Silliman, led by Dr Perry Ong, doing inventory work in the last patch of lowland forest, just north of Manila (*Marisol Pedragoso*).

from WWF Malaysia, has collected a wide range of sharks and rays from the coastal waters of northern Borneo: some are new to science and some are new records for the region.
 Source: IUCN, 9 April 1997.

Sightings of rare birds

A team of scientists evaluating boundaries for a new reserve in the Kelapat Mada mountain range on the island of Buru, Indonesia, has recorded birds that have not been seen for years. They include the black-colored parrot *Tanygnathus gramineus* and the rufous-throated white-eye *Madanga ruficollis*, the latter previously known only from museum specimens collected in the 1920s.
 Source: *Avicultural Magazine*, 102 (3), 143.

Animal smugglers arrested

In the Philippines, police arrested two men in September 1996 who were attempting to smuggle dozens of endangered animals out of Palawan province. The animals, which were captured on Balabac Island, included 46 mouse deer *Tragulus spp.*, squirrels, primates and a wild cat. Thirteen of the mouse deer died from pneumonia and stress; the remaining animals were given medical treatment and returned to the wild.
 Source: *TRAFFIC USA*, December 1996, 12.

EAST ASIA

Przewalski's horse returned to steppe

Przewalski's horse *Equus przewalskii* is back on the Mongolian mountain steppe

after an absence of 30 years. A joint Mongolian–Dutch project has reintroduced the horse, bred at semi-reserves in Europe, to the Hustain Nuruu Steppe Reserve. The reserve contains 55 horses, 17 of which were born in there. Hustain Nuruu was officially approved as a reserve in 1993 and measures were introduced to protect wildlife in 1994. The reserve is situated about 97 km south-west of Ulaan Baatar, the capital of Mongolia. The close proximity of a large human population has caused problems for wildlife such as competition with domestic livestock and hunting. The new protection measures have also benefited animals such as the Mongolian gazelle *Procapra gutturosa*, which had not been seen by local people for 20 years but now numbers 70. Red deer *Cervus elaphus*, argali sheep *Ovis ammon*, black stork *Ciconia nigra*, bubak marmots *Marmota bubac*, long-tailed Siberian earless marmots *Citellus undulatus* and Tolai hares *Lepus tolai* have all increased in numbers.
 Source: *Russian Conservation News*, Winter 1997, 16–17.

Death sentence for panda poachers

China has imposed death sentences on two men caught in possession of two pelts of giant panda *Ailuropoda melanoleuca* and one of golden snub-nosed monkey *Rhinopithecus roxellana*, both endangered species. The men are to remain in prison for 2 years before a final decision is made on their sentences; if they show remorse the sentences may be reduced to life imprisonment. An accomplice was given a life sentence and five others were jailed for 8–15 years.
 Source: *TRAFFIC USA*, December 1996, 12.

Saunders's gulls

A census of Saunders's gull *Larus saundersi* on wintering grounds in the Far East in early 1996 found 4387 birds, almost a 50 per cent increase on the previous world population estimate.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, March 1997, 5.

Oiled birds in Sea of Japan

Over 6000 tonnes of oil from a tanker wrecked in the Sea of Japan in early January spread over most of the northern coastline of Japan's main island, affecting hundreds of birds. Over 750 oiled birds were reported but because the tanker sank far offshore many more may have been lost at sea. The species affected include the threatened Japanese murrelet *Synthliboramphus wumizusume*, the ancient murrelet *S. antiquus* and the rhinoceros auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*. There was concern that the oil would affect seabirds arriving for the breeding season.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, March 1997, 2.

Killer whales captured for aquaria

The Taiji Whalers Union in Japan captured 10 killer whales *Orcinus orca* in February, the first time that this species has been taken from the wild for public display since Iceland did so in 1989 and the first Japanese capture in 10 years. Although the capture was said to be for research, after marine park personnel examined the orcas five were released and five were taken by three Japanese ocean parks.
 Source: *BBC Wildlife*, April 1997, 54.

Rosewood alternative

Japanese researchers have found a way to treat plantation-grown Japanese cedar *Cryptomeria japonica* so that its acoustic qualities match those of Brazilian rosewood *Dalbergia nigra*, which has traditionally been used for the best guitars but which is now endangered and expensive. The treatment involves soaking the wood in phenolic resin for 10 days and compressing it at 150°C for 15 minutes. Guitarists are said to be impressed with the acoustic quality.

Source: *New Scientist*, 29 March 1997, 6.

NORTH AMERICA

Logging threat to rare bear

The spirit or Kermode black bear is threatened following a decision by the provincial government of British Columbia to allow logging within its range. The bear is a rare variant of the North American black bear *Ursus americanus*, known as the spirit bear because 10 per cent of cubs are born white. About 100 bears are found on two islands off British Columbia and a small stretch of mainland Canada. The province may create a 265,000 ha wilderness park to protect the bear, but a decision will not be made for 2 years. Source: *New Scientist*, 29 March 1997, 13.

Right whale protected

New regulations in the US will protect the endangered northern right whale *Balaena glacialis* from human disturbance. Ships, aircraft, jet skis and swimmers are affected and vessels must remain at least 457 m from the animals. Any

ship that comes within this distance is required to move away at a safe speed. Right whale populations have declined from about 10,000 in the last century to current total of about 300. Biologists at the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration believe that human disturbance has contributed to the whale population's failure to recover. Source: *New Scientist*, 22 February, 9.

Seals may lose protection

A scheme that would allow the killing of seals and sea lions has been proposed by the US Government to protect fish stocks. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), which manages fisheries in US waters, wants a law protecting marine mammals amended, to allow fishermen to kill marine mammals if individuals present a specific hazard to recovering fish stocks or to a particular fisherman's catch. Californian sea lions *Zalophus californianus* and harbour seals *Phoca vitulina* have been protected by the Marine Mammal Protection Act since 1972, although amendments were later made to allow wild-life managers to make local culls after approval. Populations of both species have grown to tens of thousands and, although once endangered, neither is now considered at risk. The request comes partly in response to problems with sea lions at Ballard Locks in Washington State. The upstream rivers are important breeding grounds for steelhead trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss*, a species listed as endangered largely because of overfishing, and the sea lions have learned to catch the fish at a fish ladder that allows the salmon to pass the locks. Many wildlife experts

are opposing the proposal claiming that the seals are being used as a scapegoat for failure in fisheries management. Source: *New Scientist*, 12 April 1997, 11.

Spying on the environment

Satellites, once used to monitor Soviet troops in the Middle East, may soon be used to observe changes in the environment, such as shifting sand in deserts and changes in old-growth forests. Twenty-four sites have been chosen, including the Mojave Desert, the Luquillo experimental forest in Puerto Rico, the Czech Republic's Sumava Mountains, a mixed coniferous-deciduous forest in Pleshcheyevo, Russia and the high slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. It is hoped that the project will eventually monitor up to 500 sites. Each area will be photographed at regular intervals over a long period of time and scientists hope to pick up changes that could signal impending ecological disasters. The information is to remain secret, however, in order to protect the locations and abilities of American surveillance systems. Some scientists have expressed reservations over the project's lack of openness and international co-operation. Source: *Audubon*, January / February 1997, 19–22.

Models to warn pilots

Computerized models are being used by the US military to help prevent aircraft collisions with birds in flight. Every year an average of 2700 collisions of this nature are reported by air-force pilots. Researchers with the Air Force's Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard Team have been using models of bird abundance to warn pilots of areas that are

known to support high numbers of soaring birds.
Source: Wildlife Conservation, February 1997, 12.

Quotas increase for tuna

The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) has voted to increase commercial fishing quotas for bluefin tuna

Thunnus thynnus thynnus in the western Atlantic, despite concern over decreasing stocks. High demand for the tuna has caused populations to drop to an all-time low, and in the western Atlantic, stocks have declined by 90 per cent since the mid 1970s. The quota has been increased by more than 150 metric tonnes, contrary to advice from scientists who called for a minimum reduction of 1500 tonnes to allow stocks to recover. The Ocean Wildlife Campaign Consortium claim that the increase is a response to heavy lobbying from the commercial fishing industry and is investigating the legality of the decision under the Sustainable Fisheries Act of 1996, which requires the US to restore depleted fish stocks. It is also contrary to the United Nation's Agreement of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, signed in 1995 and ratified by the US Senate in late 1996, which calls on nations to set catch limits and eliminate overfishing.
Source: Wildlife Conservation, April 1997, 8.

Hunting ban for wolves

New legislation will repeal a 1993 Alaskan state regulation for airborne hunting that allows anyone holding a £10 trapping permit to fly over wolf habitat, land near a wolf pack and fire at the wolves. The abolition is supported by many hunters as well as non-

hunters because the practice was generally regarded as a violation of basic hunting codes. The success of the ban now depends on enforcement by Alaska's Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection.
Source: BBC Wildlife, April 1997, 51.

Whitefish extinct

The deepwater shortnose cisco *Coregonus reighardi*, a whitefish species found only in the Great Lakes of North America, is now thought to be extinct. Once widespread in Lakes Michigan and Ontario, it was last seen in Lake Huron in 1985. The species's decline coincided with the introduction of the alefish and the sea lamprey in the mid-1990s.
Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin, February 1997, 72.

Bison deaths in Yellowstone

Less than half the bison herd that lives in Yellowstone National Park survived the harsh winter of 1996–97. About 850 starved or froze to death and another 1080 moved out of the park, to be shot by Montana officials, who fear that bison could infect cattle with brucellosis. The other two wild herds in the USA, in Alaska and Utah, are managed by hunting, but culling was stopped in Yellowstone in 1967 in favour of natural regulation. As a result the herd increased to 3500 in 10 years. Shoshone Indians, the Wyoming descendants of the tribe that hunted in Yellowstone in the 1800s, have proposed renewing traditional bison hunts to control the park population but park officials have declined, citing rules that limit hunting to problem grizzly bears.
Source: The Guardian, 15 April 1997.

Climate change affects shearwaters

During only 7 years the sooty shearwater *Puffinus griseus* population on the Californian coast has decreased by 90 per cent. An increase in ocean temperature is thought to be responsible, causing a massive reduction in the birds' prey, plankton. It is believed to be evidence that global warming is taking effect on natural ecosystems. Four million sooty shearwaters have been lost from the area.
Source: BBC Wildlife, April 1997, 51.

Eagle deaths linked to coots

Since November 1996, 22 bald eagles *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* have been found dead or dying in the area of De Gray Ovachita and Hamilton Lakes, south-east of Hot Springs, Arkansas, USA. Lesions were found on a sick eagle's brain tissue and researchers believe that the cause is a toxin. Coots *Fulica americana*, preyed on by bald eagles, may be linked to the illness – sick coots have been spotted in the locality. Tests on the coots have been inconclusive. A similar incident was recorded at De Gray between November 1994 and February 1995 when 24 eagles were stricken.
Source: Wildlife Conservation, April 1997, 13.

Police involved in theft?

In October 1996 a lorry carrying over 500,000 olive ridley turtle *Lepidochelys olivacea* eggs was discovered by the authorities in Mexico City. The illegal load had been stolen from a beach in the south-western state of Oaxaca. An environmental organization 'Group of 100' claim police complicity in the theft, providing

protection for the illegal shipments of eggs to markets where they are sold as aphrodisiacs. Federal police authorities have denied any involvement. Poachers also stole hundreds of thousands of eggs from a nearby beach in August. Nests were left unguarded when marines were ordered to a local town to suppress a guerrilla attack. *Source: TRAFFIC Bulletin*, March 1997, 85.

Navy to help the shrike

The US Navy has agreed to assist conservation measures for the San Clemente Island subspecies of loggerhead shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*. The population has decreased to only 15 individuals because of predation by feral cats and rats, habitat destruction by goats and by fires caused by shells exploding during target practice. The American Bird Conservancy had threatened the Navy with legal action in an attempt to save the remaining birds. The Navy has agreed to cull predators, reduce target practice and control the spread of fires. A breeding programme for the birds at San Diego Zoo also hopes to release 40 captive-bred juveniles this year. *Source: World Birdwatch*, March 1997, 4.

CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

White frog discovered

A new frog species has been discovered in Costa Rica that is almost pure white with occasional black markings. The new frog has been named the phantom frog *Eleutherodactylus phasma* by Karen R. Lips and

Jay M. Savage who discovered it. Only one specimen has been collected.

Source: BBC Wildlife, May 1997, 22.

Artificial coral reefs

The sea life and coral reefs of Jamaica have been badly damaged in recent years by sewage from coastal tourist developments. The situation has been improved by scientists from the Global Coral Reef Alliance, who have developed a system that accelerates coral growth. Solar panels generate a mild electrical current that flows to a steel frame on the ocean floor. This causes limestone precipitation from the water on to the frame, providing ideal conditions for coral growth. Four 'solar powered reefs' have been constructed in the seas around Jamaica. Long-term success will depend on whether large reefs can be created with the stability and complexity of natural reefs. This will be tested by a project in Panama that plans to power a 4.6 × 9.2-m reef by floating solar panels. *Source: Audubon*, March–April, 23.

Rare Haitian plants found

In May 1996 an expedition to look for *Copernicia ekmanii*, a rare endemic Haitian palm, found four populations of the species. About 1200 individual plants were counted of which only a dozen were regular producers. The plant had been documented only twice previously. The survey also located another rare Haitian endemic *Attalea crassispatha*. Fewer than 30 individuals were found in two adjacent river valleys, making it one of the rarest plants in the Americas. Both plants are slow to grow and reproduce, long-lived, and

exist in small populations adapted to a narrow range of conditions. Without action, human exploitation and encroachment may lead to extinction. The Botanical Foundation of Haiti has been formed to work on plant conservation and environmental education, and is working with the government on a proposed national park system. *Source: Botanic Gardens Conservation News*, December 1996, 39–40.

New national park

Lago Eriquillo and its adjacent wetlands in the Dominican Republic have been declared a national park. Once a marine strait, the lake now lies in a depression more than 40 m below sea level. Much of the area is desert, with remnant coral reef, mesquite trees and cacti. The lake's waters have over double the concentration of salt as the sea water. It supports a large population of American crocodile *Crocodylus acutus*, American flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber* and two species of ground iguanas. Freshwater seeps in the area were becoming used for agriculture and other human activities. The park will prevent further encroachment and become the nucleus of a new biosphere reserve, protecting montane and cloud forest to the north and south of the lake. *Source: Wildlife Conservation*, April 1997, 8.

Concern for Antillean amphibians

Long-term studies of amphibians in Puerto Rico have concluded that, of 18 endemic species, three may have become extinct; karl's robber frog *Eleutherodactylus karlschmidtii*, the cayey robber

frog *E. jasperi* and the villalba robber frog *E. eneidae*. Of those remaining, seven species are declining and two are at risk. The extinct species all show morphological or ecological specialization and occur at high elevations. Puerto Rico is relatively well preserved, which has led to concern over the status of amphibians on other islands in the Greater Antilles. *Source: Froglog*, August 1996, 1.

SOUTH AMERICA

Forests threatened by drugs

Colombian drug traffickers are clearing land for the cultivation of opium poppies to produce heroin in Venezuela's 295,000 ha Sierra de Perija National Park and the adjoining 255,000 ha hydrological reserve. The area is ideal for the traffickers; poppies grow well on the rich soil and it is remote, reached only by air. The Venezuelan military burned a 200-ha poppy field in February but the size of the region and the persistence of the traffickers makes patrolling difficult and dangerous. *Source: BBC Wildlife*, May 1997, 62.

New deer found in zoo

A new species of brocket deer has been discovered in a Brazilian zoo. The deer originated from Atlantic rain-forest near Capao Bonito City, but was noticeably different to known brocket deer; larger with more red coloration and white patches to the face. Genetic analysis has confirmed the deer as a new species and it has been named *Mazama bororo*. It is regarded as endangered. *Source: BBC Wildlife*, May 1997, 20.

Corridors for conservation

A new approach to rain-forest conservation could protect more than 75 per cent of Brazil's tropical biodiversity in only 20 per cent of its land area. By focusing on corridors of forest the problems of habitat fragmentation, and its impact on evolution and species survival, could be reduced, rather than exacerbated by protecting small isolated pockets of forest as reserves. Seven major corridors have been identified in Brazil totalling 500,000 km. Implementation of the corridor concept would involve the co-operation of Brazil's federal and state governments, international non-governmental organizations, indigenous groups and the private sector. *Source: Conservation International*, 9 December 1996.

Mangroves cleared for shrimps

Large areas of mangrove forest in Ecuador have been cleared to make way for shrimp farms prompting environmentalists to call for a boycott on shrimp exports. It has been illegal to destroy mangrove since 1987 but shrimps are a major export and the destruction continues. The practice involves enclosing an area of mangrove, draining and clearing it then flooding the area with fresh water to grow the wild larvae of penaeid shrimps. *Source: BBC Wildlife*, March 1997, 64.

Fishing threat to Galápagos

Illegal fishing threatens to destroy the unique marine ecosystem in the waters around the Galápagos Islands. Industrial fishing fleets from mainland Ecuador, the US and

the Far East are exploiting the Galápagos Marine Reserve despite an official ban. The waters were declared a biological reserve under the control of the National Parks Service, but there are no resources to protect the area. Traditional fishing is allowed in some areas of the reserve but there has been an increase in tuna fleets, fishing for sharks and large-scale spear fishing. The marine ecosystem supports a vast array of species, many of which are only found in these waters; of 437 fish species in nearshore waters, 41 are unique to the Galápagos. In December the United Nation's World Heritage Committee warned that the country would be put on the 'in danger list' unless Ecuador dealt with 52 issues that compromised the island's status as a World Heritage Site. *Source: New Scientist*, 15 March 1997, 9.

Tortoises threatened

Vital habitat for giant tortoises and other fauna on Volcán Alcedo, Isabela, in the Galápagos, is collapsing due to the rapid expansion of a feral, goat population (*Oryx*, 30 [4], 248). The collapse may be complete within a year if the population continues to grow, and conservationists are calling for immediate action to eradicate the goats. *Source: Conservation Biology*, April 1997, 305.

Ban for big leaf mahogany?

The Bolivian and the US governments have submitted a joint proposal to list big leaf mahogany *Swietenia macrophylla* on Appendix II of CITES. Previous attempts have been unsuccessful but the support of Bolivia, the world's second-largest exporter of mahogany,

and the US, the world's largest importer of the timber, add weight to the proposal. Its commercial viability is estimated at 20–100 years and unsustainable logging is causing genetic erosion and preventing regeneration.
 Source: *BBC Wildlife*, March 1997, 67.

Macaws decline

In 1996 surveys of a known stronghold of blue-throated macaws *Ara glaucogularis* in eastern Bolivia revealed a 50 per cent decline on the previous year's total of 25 birds in 20 sq km. The total wild population is now only about 100 pairs. The birds are found near a main road into Brazil that is easily accessible to trappers who smuggle the birds across the border. An education programme hopes to encourage macaw conservation and an agreement is being negotiated whereby landowners take more responsibility.
 Source: *World Birdwatch*, March 1997, 4.

Pesticide withdrawn to save hawk

An agreement between the American Bird Conservancy and pesticides manufacturer Ciba-Geigy has helped prevent the deaths of Swainson's hawks *Buteo swainsonii* in Argentina. Up to 20,000 hawks died on their wintering grounds in the La Pampas region after monocrotophos had been used to kill grasshoppers, the hawk's main food (see *Oryx*, 30 [4], 248). Ciba-Geigy has taken monocrotophos off the market in areas where the hawk winters, has bought back stock from farmers and is supporting a public education programme. The Argentine Government has

agreed to ban the use of pesticides on grasshoppers and alfalfa. No dead hawks were found this winter.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, March 1997, 2.

New beaked whale

A new species of beaked whale has been described from the bones of a single skull found on Robinson Crusoe Island in Chile. It has been named Bahamonde's beaked whale *Mesoplodon bahamondi*. Of the 13 other *Mesoplodon* species known, nine have been described from a single specimen and the strap-toothed beaked whale, discovered in 1865, from only drawings.
 Source: *BBC Wildlife*, March 1997, 20.

PACIFIC

Forest plan allows logging

The forests of the Torricelli ranges on the Sepik coast of Papua New Guinea are at risk from logging and oil-palm operations under the Papua New Guinea National Forest Plan. The area is well known for its endemic marsupials and includes the entire habitat of Scott's tree kangaroo *Dendrolagus scottae*, which was only recently identified. Other species of note include Goodfellow's tree kangaroo *Dendrolagus goodfellowi* var. *pulcherrimus*, northern glider *Petaurus abidi*, Musser's shrew mouse *Microhydromys musseri*, known from only one collection, and two horseshoe bats *Hipposideros edwardshilli* and *Hipposideros wollastoni* var. *fasensis*. The forests are also home to the Northern hydromiline *Paraleptomys rufilatus*, which has a range restricted to the

Torricellis and the Cyclops Mountains of Irian Jaya. These animals are all threatened by hunting pressure in addition to the threat to their forest habitat. Many live above 400 m, where which logging is banned, but the restriction is rarely enforced. The construction of roads will also open up safe areas of forest habitat to hunting.
 Source: *Arborvitae*, January 1997, 2.

AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND/ANTARCTICA

Farmers poison wildlife

It is officially estimated that 500,000 animals die from sodium monofluoroacetate poisoning every year in Tasmania. Farmers use the poison (sold under the name 1080) to control animals that feed on agricultural and arboreal farmland. Opponents of the use of the poison say that the actual figure is much higher. They also claim that the poison affects scavengers that feed on the poisoned animals and that, in a state where almost 200 native birds, animals, reptiles and invertebrates are endangered, caution should be applied in the use of such a control. Alternatives such as good fencing, tree guards and repellents have been suggested.
 Source: *BBC Wildlife*, May 1997, 60.

Fishing resumed at reef

A 5-year management research programme at the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, Australia, will open a number of sanctuary areas to commercial fishing as part of a study into the decline of fish stocks. The Australian Parliament has passed a law to allow the fishing, which will provide data on the dynamics

of fish stock decline. Fishing will be banned in an equivalent number of areas that were formerly fished in order to study their recovery. The research will be used to calculate sustainable levels of exploitation for the Barrier Reef and so avoid over-fishing in the future. Some environmentalists are concerned that the fishing will increase pressure to open the reef to fishing in order to supply lucrative markets such as the live reef fish trade in Hong Kong. There is also concern that the research will damage the ecology of the reefs.
Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin, February 1997, 72.

Aliens on the increase

In the last 10 years the number of introduced wild animals in New Zealand has increased rapidly and over 264 new populations of deer, thar, chamois, goats, pigs and wallabies have been recorded. Many animals escape from farms and 39 per cent are illegally liberated. Only six per cent originated from natural dispersal. Failure to maintain deer fences is an offence under the Wild Animal Control Act and large fines can be imposed for the release of wild animals. Red deer *Cervus elaphus*, fallow deer *Dama dama* and feral goats make up a large proportion of the introduced species and sika deer *Cervus nippon* are often found in the wild. In certain areas hunters may release animals deliberately to establish new populations.
Source: Forest & Bird, February 1997, 7.

Tuatara reintroduction

Tuatara *Sphenodon punctatus* have been reintroduced to Red Mercury Island off the Coromandel, New Zealand after a successful rat-eradication

programme. The six remaining tuatara were captured and bred at Auckland Zoo while the rat poisoning was carried out. In November 1996, the adults and 12 juveniles were released.
Source: Forest & Bird, February 1997, 6.

Islands may be protected

New Zealand's five subantarctic island groups will be proposed as World Heritage sites. The Snares, the Auckland Islands, Campbell Island, the Antipodes and the Bounties comprise some of the finest pristine island ecosystems in the world, supporting large populations of sea birds and marine mammals and many endangered species. The world's rarest sea lion, Hooker's sea lion *Phocartos hookeri*, is found there but is threatened by the Auckland Islands Squid fishery. By mid-February this year an estimated 85 sea lions had been drowned in the squid trawl nets (already exceeding last year's quota) and no limit had been agreed for 1997. Conservationists are campaigning for the closure of the fishery.
Source: Forest & Bird Conservation News, February 1997, 1.

Dam disaster for wildlife

The Opuha Dam in South Canterbury, New Zealand, has collapsed killing thousands of eels and fish, and affecting an important area for birds. The dam flows into the Opihi river, an important feeding and nesting site for black-fronted dotterel *Euseyornis melanops*, terns and black-billed gulls *Larus bulleri*. The dam was opposed by conservationists, who are now calling for stricter national standards and control of dam design and construction.
Source: Forest & Bird Conservation News, February 1997, 4.

PUBLICATIONS

Seychelles Red Data Book

The first *Seychelles Red Data Book* was published by The Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles in March. It covers all indigenous and endemic plants and animals using the 1994 IUCN Red List criteria and provides a summary of status and threats for each species, and proposed conservation measures.
 Obtainable at a cost of £20 (including postage) from the Nature Protection Trust of Seychelles, PO Box 207, Victoria, Mahé, Seychelles.

Desert Ecology of Abu Dhabi

The National Avian Research Center in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, part of the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA), has published the first comprehensive review of the wildlife and ecology of the deserts of Abu Dhabi. It can be obtained at a cost of 120 Dhs from ERWDA's Press and Information Officer, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Important Bird Areas in Turkey

The Society for the Protection of Nature, Turkey (DHKD) has published *Important Bird Areas in Turkey* by Gernant Magnin and Murat Yazar, a description of the ornithological importance of, and conservation threats to, the country's 97 most valued bird areas. The book costs \$US35 and can be obtained from DHKD, PO Box 18, 80810 Bebek, Istanbul, Turkey; Fax: +90 (212) 279 55 44; e-mail: dhkd@sariyer.cc.itu.edu.tr.

The Cheetah in India

Divyabhanusinh's book (1995, Banyan Books, 59 Regal Building, Parliament Street,

New Delhi 110 001, India), *The End of the Trail: The Cheetah in India*, deserves recognition internationally. It is well written, beautifully illustrated and accurate – one of the best books on the cheetah I have ever read. It reviews the history of knowledge of cheetahs in India and neighbouring regions, covering their training for use as hunting animals (the Emperor Akbar kept 1000) until their extinction. The last definite record was in 1947, although they may have lingered on until the 1960s in places. A superb book. *Colin Groves, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.*

OBITUARY

Philip Hershkovitz, Curator Emeritus at the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, died on 15 February 1997 aged 87. He joined the museum in 1947 and was appointed curator of mammals in 1956. He retired in 1971 but continued to work on Neotropical mammals and carried out fieldwork in Brazil as recently as 1992. He wrote more than 300 scientific, popular and encyclopedia articles, and the information he collected was the basis for much of the conservation planning that is being carried out now in most of the major habitats in South America. He found 75 new species and subspecies of mammal in South America and about 12 species were named after him.

PEOPLE

Adelmar F. Coimbra-Filho has received a Lifetime Achievement Award (1997) from the Ford

Motor Company (see Awards). A member of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, he was one of the first to draw attention to the plight of the Atlantic Forest and has been a dedicated campaigner for its conservation. He is internationally renowned for his pioneering work on the behaviour, ecology, conservation and breeding of lion tamarins and for the creation of the Poço das Antas and Una Biological reserves, for his rediscovery of the black lion tamarin and for the creation of the Rio de Janeiro Primate Centre, which breeds and carries out research on threatened Brazilian primates.

AWARDS

New conservation award launched in Brazil

In 1996 the Ford Motor Company in partnership with Conservation International established the Ford Motor Company Brazilian Conservation Awards, to support conservation and environmental initiatives, empower new leaders, and reward lifetime achievements in biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in Brazil. Awards will be presented annually, each comprising \$US10,000 and a medal. The award was officially launched on 21 February 1997 and the first Lifetime Achievement Award (1977) presented to Adelmar F. Coimbra-Filho (see People).

MEETINGS

11th World Forestry Congress. 13–22 October 1997, Antalya, Turkey. *Contact:* Secretary-

General, World Forestry Congress, Department of Foreign Relations, Ministry of Forestry, Ataturk Bulvarı 153, Ankara, Turkey. Tel: 90 312 4177724; Fax: 90 312 4179160; e-mail: obdi-f@servis.net.tr.

3rd International Conference on Wildlife Management in Amazonia. 3–7 December 1997, Santa Cruz, Bolivia. *Contact:* Dr. Richard Bodmer, Tropical Conservation and Development Programme, University of Florida, PO Box 115531, Gainesville, FL. 32611-5531, USA. Tel: +(352) 373 3186; Fax: +(352) 392 0085; e-mail: tcd@tcd.ufl.edu.

The 1998 International Meeting of the Society for Conservation Biology. 3–16 July 1998, Sydney, Australia. *Contact:* George McKay, School of Biological Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW 2109, Australia. E-mail: george.mckay@mq.edu.au/.

VII International Congress of Ecology, New Tasks for Ecologists after Rio 92. 19–25 July 1998, Florence, Italy. *Contact:* Almo Farina, Lunigiana Museum of Natural History, Fortezza della Brunella, 54011 Aulla, Italy; Tel: +39 (187) 400252; Fax: +39 (187)420727; e-mail: afarina@tamnet.it.

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.