

## INTERNATIONAL

**Migratory sites network**

A network of sites to protect around 60 species of birds that migrate from the Arctic down the eastern side of Asia to Australia was launched at a meeting of the 92 signatories to the Ramsar Convention. At least six governments – Australia, China, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand and the Philippines – are expected to nominate sites for the scheme, which will be known as the East Asian–Australasian Shorebird Reserve Network. *Source: New Scientist*, 16 March 1996, 8.

**Towards sustainable fishing**

Unilever, the world's largest buyer of frozen fish and owner of Birdseye and Iglo brands, has teamed up with the World Wide Fund for Nature in an effort to protect the world's declining fisheries. A Marine Stewardship Council will be formed to identify sustainable fisheries and products from them will be allowed to use a logo declaring them to be environmentally sound. Fish with 'sustainably caught' labels should be available in 1998 and consumer pressure may succeed in helping conserve the world's fish stocks where governments have failed. *Source: New Scientist*, 2 March 1996, 11.

**US in battle over Italian drift-netting**

The US Government is embroiled in a legal battle with environmentalists over its failure to take action against illegal drift-netting by Italy. A coalition of six environmental

organizations is asking the American Court of International Trade to force the US Government to implement its own 1992 High Seas Driftnet Enforcement Act. Applying this legislation would mean that the US would have 90 days in which to negotiate for the Italian fleet to stop illegal drift-netting; if it failed the US would be forced to impose a trade embargo on all Italian imports of fish and fish products (worth some \$US2 million a year) as well as coral products (worth an estimated \$US1 billion a year). In the event of illegal drift-netting continuing in the face of these embargoes, trade restrictions would then be applied to a wider range of imports. The 600 vessels of the Italian drift-net fleet in the Mediterranean continue to use nets longer than 2.5 km to catch swordfish; in fact swordfish account for only 18 per cent of the catch and 4000–8000 cetaceans are killed needlessly in the process.

*Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 32 (2), 184.

**Year of the Reef**

In an effort to raise public awareness and alert the global community to the rapidly deteriorating state of the world's coral reefs, 1997 has been designated the International Year of the Reef. This is an initiative of the international coral reef research and conservation community and has received endorsement from a wide range of organizations. Further information: Sue Wells, 56 Oxford Road, Cambridge CB4 3PW, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1223 350 409; e-mail: [suwells@wcmc.org.uk](mailto:suwells@wcmc.org.uk); or Stephen Colwell, CORAL, 809 Delaware Street, Berkeley CA 94710, USA. Tel: +1 510 528 2492; Fax: +1 510 528 9317; e-mail: [coralreef@aol.com](mailto:coralreef@aol.com)

**Transmitter development**

Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation in conjunction with BirdLife International is developing a 15-g transmitter, which will allow conservationists to track by satellite many medium-sized migratory birds – herons, ducks and waders – for the first time. The long-term aim is to track the slender-billed curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, one of Europe's most threatened and poorly known birds. *Source: BirdLife International*, 10 April 1996.

## EUROPE

**Lynx hunt in Norway**

Norwegian hunters are being allowed to kill a minimum of 79 lynx *Lynx lynx* this year and, if a census this spring reveals a larger population than the 500 estimated, the hunting quota may increase to 103. The wildlife authorities say that the hunt is needed to protect sheep and reindeer (livestock inspectors claim that lynx killed 5460 sheep last year and the Norwegian Government paid Kroner 23 million – c. £2.4 million – in compensation). The World Wide Fund for Nature says that of the 116,000 sheep that died of natural causes last year lynx killed fewer than 5 per cent. *Source: New Scientist*, 9 March 1996, 12.

**A new park for Finland**

Valkmusa National Park is being established in south-eastern Finland, close to the coast. It consists of peatlands, which are either in a natural state or almost so, and will

protect habitats that in many respects resemble bogs and mires found further north. In addition to an interesting flora, it contains several breeding bird species, including wood sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, green-shank *T. nebularia* and golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, which seldom nest as far south as this. *Source: Suomen Luonto*, 55 (4), 58.

### Oil spill – worst for 30 years

On 15 February the super-tanker *Sea Empress* ran aground off the UK's South Wales coast. Six days later it was towed ashore, having spilled an estimated 70,000 tonnes of oil. The spill affected thousands of sea-birds and some of the country's most valuable coastal habitats. At least 190 km of shoreline were oiled, including two marine nature reserves, a coastal national park and proposed EU Special Areas for Conservation. The spill is the worst British marine disaster since the *Torrey Canyon* spill in the English Channel in 1967.

*Source: New Scientist*, 2 March 1996, 3–5.

### Bog saved

Flanders Moss, west of Stirling, UK, has been saved from industrial peat extraction by Scottish Natural Heritage, which has bought the peat rights for £1.8 million. Flanders Moss is an internationally important raised peat bog with outstanding plant and bird interest.

*Source: Birds*, Summer 1996, 8.

### Sand lizard reintroduction

A partnership of UK government and non-governmental organizations engaged in a project for the sand lizard *Lacerta agilis*, has created a captive breeding colony of these

animals at Chester Zoo. Their progeny will be released into the wild at selected sites, mainly in North-West England. The decline of the sand lizard in the UK has been caused by poor habitat management and loss of sites, as well as human disturbance. The species once occurred in dunes and heathlands in several counties in southern England, North-West England and North Wales but it now remains naturally only in Dorset, Surrey and Merseyside, with an estimated 6000 breeding individuals. *Source: English Nature*, 3 May 1996.

### Millenium seed bank

The UK Millenium Commission has granted £21,615,000 to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for a new seed bank to be opened in 2000. The bank will collect, research and conserve the UK flora and the world's dryland flora. Provision has been made for 60 visiting scientists a year to carry out research on their native floras in collaboration with core staff. It is hoped that the bank will attract 250,000 other visitors a year as part of an educational and public awareness effort. *Source: Species*, No. 25, 21.

### Lawyer kills plan to cull birds of prey

British landowners have been told by their legal adviser that they have no chance of winning their campaign to license the killing of birds of prey. The claim that rare birds of prey ought to be shot in order to preserve red grouse *Lagopus lagopus* for shooting has no sound scientific evidence, according to a report to the Scottish Landowners' Federation. Birds of prey are protected by the Wildlife and

Countryside Act 1981, which allows them to be killed only if they are endangering other wild birds.

*Source: New Scientist*, 30 March 1996, 7.

### Butterfly reintroduction

Chequered skipper butterflies *Carterocephalus palaemon* from the Ardennes forests of north-eastern Belgium and France were released into a woodland site in the East Midlands of UK. The species died out in its last British localities in 1975 and it is now threatened elsewhere in its range.

*Source: Reintroduction News*, No. 11, December 1995, 9.

### Slovakia's forests

A proposed project to manage old-growth forests in Slovakia, which was due to be part-funded by the World Bank, has been abandoned after pressure from environmental groups. The project completely overlooked the ecological impacts of its planned operations, including the proposed expansion of the forest road network. The forests are home to a large population of the globally threatened imperial eagle *Aquila heliaca* and a number of other threatened species.

*Source: IBA News*, March 1996, 2.

### New Romanian law

On 29 December 1995, the Romanian Parliament adopted a new environmental protection law. It will enable the designation of Important Bird Areas as statutory protected areas and stipulates that a Romanian Red List of plant and animal species, and a catalogue of protected areas and nature monuments be published and kept up to date.

*Source: IBA News*, March 1996, 2.

### Greek Ramsar sites at risk

Three Greek Ramsar sites are under threat. Lake Kerkini, a wintering site for lesser white-fronted geese *Anser erythropus* and Dalmatian pelicans *Pelecanus crispus*, is to have its irrigation storage capacity increased, which will have profound effects on the lake's ecology. Water quality in Lake Langada and Lake Volvi has declined seriously in the past 15 years due to pollution, and the periodic lowering of water levels to supply agricultural needs has contributed to a major ecological crisis. A sudden lowering of water levels in Lake Langada in August 1995 was followed by the death of fish and several thousand birds. *Source: IBA News*, March 1996, 3.

### NORTH EURASIA

#### Marine Mammal Council

Russia has created a Marine Mammal Council to protect marine mammals from the many threats that face them, including oil and gas exploration, diamond extraction in the White Sea, illegal fishing and dumping of nuclear waste. The Council, which met for the first time in October 1995, resolved to start research programmes that will attempt to assess the threats and to make recommendations on marine mammal conservation to the Russian Government and the international community. One of the critical research needs identified was for the white whale, or beluga, *Delphinapterus leucas*, which has changed migration routes as a result of the activities of oil and gas industries. *Source: Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly*, 44 (4), 7.

© 1996 FFI, *Oryx*, 30 (3)

### NORTH AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

#### Renewed efforts for Siberian crane

As part of a last-ditch attempt to boost the western flock of Siberian cranes *Grus leucogeranus*, two male cranes were shipped to Iran from the USA-based International Crane Foundation's captive flock in January. They were released to join the small (8–11 birds) flock that winters in the Caspian lowlands, where it is hoped they will pair with wild females who will lead them north. If they do, scientists will track them and may be able to map the migration route and locate the breeding ground in Russia. The only other population of the western flock is in India and this may be reduced to one breeding pair. In China, the eastern flock consists of almost 3000 birds, which winter along the lower reaches of the Yangtze River (see Return of the lost cranes, page 170).

*Source: The ICF Bugle*, February 1996, 8.

### SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

#### Weevils for waterweeds

The governments of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania have agreed to release large numbers of two South American weevil species, *Neochetina eichhorniae* and *N. bruchi*, in an attempt to control the severe infestation of water hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes* clogging up Lake Victoria. The Ugandan shoreline is particularly badly affected. As well as choking out native plants, killing fish and altering the lake's ecology, the

plant is disrupting local life – fishing boats cannot leave the shore and ferries are stranded for hours. The water hyacinth, a native of South America, was first noticed in Lake Victoria in 1989. Two other Ugandan lakes, Kyoga and Albert, are also infested but not as badly. *Source: New Scientist*, 6 April 1996, 10.

#### Dogs to be vaccinated around Serengeti

Tens of thousands of domestic dogs in villages around the Serengeti National Park are to be vaccinated against canine distemper and rabies in an attempt to prevent further epidemics of these diseases in wild carnivores. Two teams, one in Kenya and one in Tanzania, will travel from village to village and hope to vaccinate at least 70 per cent of dogs, which should be sufficient to eliminate both diseases from the domestic populations.

*Source: African Wildlife Update*, April 1996, 3 & 5.

#### Action needed for hartebeest

Lichtenstein's hartebeest *Sigmoceros lichtensteini* is now probably Zimbabwe's most threatened mammal. A survey has revealed that fewer than 50 animals remain in the country in seven populations; the largest, at Carolina Wilderness Area near Harare, numbers 19. Few calves are being born and consideration is being given to moving some bulls between existing and new groups, and more hartebeest are to be imported from Zambia. The ultimate objective of Zimbabwe's Hartebeest Conservation Committee is to make the species so numerous in Zimbabwe that animals will become available for safari

hunting and then their future will be secure.

Source: *Zimbabwe Wildlife*, January–March 1996, 7.

### No culling in Kruger

For the first time in 29 years, no elephants *Loxodonta africana* are to be killed in South Africa's Kruger National Park. The park's board also announced that it will not support attempts to lift the ivory ban at next year's meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, noting South Africa's failure to overturn a ban at the last two meetings and its inability to control ivory smuggling, as highlighted by a recent judicial enquiry. The board did not, however, rule out a return to culling or future support for lifting the ban if trade could be properly controlled and the majority of African countries are in support.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, May 1996, 59.

### Rat threatens robin

The discovery of a small population of brown rats *Rattus norvegicus* on Fregate Island in the Seychelles has prompted immediate efforts to eradicate them. Fregate Island, at 210 ha, was the largest cat- and rat-free island in the archipelago, cats having been eradicated about 15 years ago. The rats pose a new risk to the highly threatened endemic bird, the Seychelles magpie-robin *Copsychus sechellarum*, which recovered from a low of 17 birds 6 years ago to 60 today, most of them on Fregate Island.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 18 (1), 4.

## SOUTH AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

### Return of the lost cranes

For two consecutive years (1993 and 1994) Siberian cranes *Grus leucogeranus* did not arrive at their wintering ground in the Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur, India. Numbers had been dwindling; in 1960 nearly 100 wintered there, but by the early 1990s only five were recorded. In the winter of 1995/96, four Siberian cranes arrived; these birds are believed to be part of the small western population of the species, which breeds east of Russia's Ural Mountains and is believed to fly south across Afghanistan and Pakistan to winter in India and Iran (see *Renewed effort for Siberian cranes*, p. 169).

Source: *New Scientist*, 23 March 1996, 11.

### Rhino recovery in Nepal

The involvement of local people in conservation efforts in Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal, has contributed to a recovery of the park's Indian rhino *Rhinoceros unicornis* population. There were 40–60 when the park was established in 1973; now there are nearly 500. The increase has allowed 38 animals to be translocated to Royal Bardia National Park, 150 km away, in order to establish a new population. Chitwan's tiger *Panthera tigris* population has also risen, from 60 in 1990 to over 100 in 1995.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, 16 (1), 3.

### Uncertain future for Asiatic wild ass

Indian scientists have confirmed that the southern kiang, a subspecies of Asiatic ass *Equus kiang polyodon* still

survives in the wild. Formerly feared to be extinct, the subspecies occupies a small area between Sikkim in northern India and the Tsangpo River in Tibet. There are between 74 and 120 southern kiang in north Sikkim in winter and numbers are lower in summer, suggesting that the animals migrate across the border. There is no reserve for the kiang; they have to compete with grazing cattle for food and face disturbance from the army or danger from minefields.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, May 1996, 22.

### Threat to mangroves

Mangrove forests in south-west Cambodia are under severe threat from exploitation for the production of charcoal. A survey in January observed the felling of mature trees and found over 200 charcoal kilns within a proposed protected area. The local office of the environment lacks the resources to protect the area fully and is urgently seeking support to conserve one of the largest stands of mangroves in the Gulf of Thailand.

Source: *Wetlands*, March 1996, 15.

### White-winged duck

The existence of the globally threatened white-winged duck *Cairina scutulata* was confirmed in Cambodia during surveys in January. Six individuals were seen in flooded forests at Lake Chhma, part of the Great Lake (Boeng Tonle Sap), a proposed protected area. Local people say the duck is rare.

Source: *Wetlands*, March 1996, 15.

### Malaysia declares first Ramsar site

Malaysia has declared the Tasik Behra wetland in Pahang

province as its first site for protection under the Ramsar Convention. Tasik Behra lake and its associated marshes, with extensive areas of reeds, freshwater and peat swamp forest, covers 65.1 sq km and is rich in species, including one of the few remaining populations of false gharial *Tomistoma schlegelii*. There have been no confirmed sightings of this crocodile in the wetland since the mid-1970s, although a fisherman recently caught a 5-m-long individual upstream. Source: *Crocodile Specialist Group Newsletter*, 15 (1), 7–8.

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## EAST ASIA

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### Wildlife trade symposium

TRAFFIC East Asia and the Agriculture and Fisheries Department of Hong Kong co-hosted an International Symposium on Traditional Chinese Medicine and Wildlife Conservation on 31 October 1995 in Hong Kong. Its purpose was to establish constructive dialogue with Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners, traders and consumers in an effort to ensure that demand for TCMs can be satisfied without harming wildlife populations. Delegates were asked to suggest public awareness activities that international conservation groups might undertake to discourage the unsustainable use of wildlife in TCM.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, 16 (1), 4.

### Chinese crackdown on wildlife restaurants

The government of Hainan Province in southern China closed down 19 hotels and restaurants that were serving

dishes featuring wildlife products, including camel humps, bear paws and monkey brains. During a 3-month investigation officials raided hotels, restaurants, harbours, railway stations, markets and shops and found more than 6300 wild animals for sale, over 3200 of which were listed under state protection. The violators were fined a total of \$US34,000.

Source: *Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly*, 44 (4), 13.

### Large fine for Hong Kong shop owner

On 10 November 1995 a Hong Kong shop-owner was fined \$HK500,000 (\$US66,500) for offering for sale medicines claiming to contain tiger *Panthera tigris* products. It was the heaviest fine ever imposed in Hong Kong for such an offence and follows recently increased penalties (fines of up to \$HK5 million and 2 years imprisonment) aimed at stamping out the sale of substances that contain or claim to contain parts of protected animals.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, 16 (1), 30.

### Hainan hare

Rapid development and urbanization on Hainan Dao, China, the largest island in the South China Sea, is threatening the endemic hare *Lepus hainanus*. Much of the hare's habitat has been destroyed and, despite legal protection, the hare is killed for its meat. Although 34 nature reserves have been established, most of these support ranching or zoo operations rather than wild animals or natural habitat. A survey in 1995 found that the hare now occurs in only two of its former seven areas of abundance. Both sites are deer ranches but one is close enough

to Haikan, the island's capital, to experience constant poaching to supply restaurants. While the law needs to be enforced, tourists expressing interest in seeing the hare in its natural habitat may influence the authorities to conserve it. Source: *Species*, No. 25, 61–62.

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## NORTH AMERICA

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### Seal hunt stopped

Canada stopped the seal hunt on its east coast on 11 April, just a month after it started. Opponents of the hunt claim that it was stopped because it was out of control, but Canadian officials say favourable ice conditions allowed hunters to shoot their entire quota (8000 hooded seals *Cystophora cristata* and 250,000 harp seals *Phoca groenlandicus*) in record time. It is believed that at least 16,500 hooded seals were killed, more than twice the quota. It is also believed that far more seals are killed than are counted in official reports because many die in the water and are not recovered.

The Canadian Sealers' Association says rapidly expanding markets for seal products will benefit Newfoundland, which has been hit hard by fisheries closures. However, some scientists fear that killing seals might make the region's fish stocks even less likely to recover because seals eat the predators of commercial fish as well as the commercial fish species themselves.

Source: *New Scientist*, 20 April 1996, 7.

### Elk horn harvest

The Canadian province of Manitoba is to legalize the

harvest of elk *Cervus elaphus* antlers for use in Traditional Chinese Medicine. The velvety covering of the newly formed antlers is particularly valued and is removed from live animals before the antlers harden. The Manitoba ranching operation is expected to start in 1996 and will be tightly regulated and humanely conducted.  
*Source: TRAFFIC Bulletin*, 16 (1), 4.

### Piping plover comeback

Banning off-road vehicles from the piping plover's *Charadrius melodus* nesting beaches has resulted in a remarkable recovery for the USA's Atlantic coast population of this bird. An 11-state survey in 1986 found only 547 breeding pairs from Maine to South Carolina; the preliminary figure for 1995 was 1150 pairs. Now federal and state officials want to reduce the protection by requesting incidental-take permits so that recreational use of the beaches can be increased.  
*Source: Audubon*, March–April 1996, 20 & 22.

### Benefiting a dragonfly

Over 200 ha of land, which includes a brown trout hatchery dating from 1871, in the town of Richmond, Rhode Island, USA, have been incorporated into the state's Carolina Management Area. Among the rare species to benefit is the 'Vulnerable' banded bog skimmer dragonfly *Williamsonia lintneri*, whose best populations in the world are found in Rhode Island.  
*Source: The Nature Conservancy*, March/April 1996, 33.

### Prairie preserve

A 200-ha addition to Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve in

western Iowa's Loess Hills has created a contiguous complex of 890 ha owned or managed by The Nature Conservancy. The deeply dissected ridges of the Loess Hills protect virgin prairie – the ridge tops harbour most of the 81 sq km of good quality prairie remaining in Iowa. Plans are under way to further expand the preserve and to convert some of its bottomland back to native prairie.  
*Source: The Nature Conservancy*, March/April 1996, 31.

### Island secured

South Williman Island in the Askepoo–Combahee–Edisto (ACE) Basin in South Carolina, USA, will remain a home for wood storks, bald eagles and migratory songbirds now that The Nature Conservancy has purchased the land for inclusion in the ACE National Estuarine Research Reserve. The 11.2-sq-km island includes extensive salt marsh, maritime forests and pools, and provides important habitat for migratory songbirds. The land was purchased from Cimarron Apartments Inc., which had originally planned residential and recreational development on the island. The Nature Conservancy has transferred the land to the state of South Carolina for addition to its state reserve, bringing to more than 445 sq km the wetland and woodland habitat protected in the ACE basin.  
*Source: The Nature Conservancy*, March/April 1996, 30.

### New high for whooping cranes

An aerial census of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, USA, and surrounding areas on 15 February found 158 whooping cranes *Grus americana*: 97 adults, 33 subadults and

28 chicks. The record increase of 25 whooping cranes from the 1994/95 winter population of 133 exceeded the previous largest 1-year increase of 24 that occurred in 1987.  
*Source: Grus Americana*, April 1996, 1.

### Redwood restoration

The Ukiah-based InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, representing 10 Indian tribes, has raised \$1.4 million to buy 15.78 sq km of redwood forest in the Lost Coast, northern California, USA. The Indians will manage the land, their ancestral home, in a traditional manner. Roads are being removed, a native plant nursery is planned and old logging sites will be repaired. If the effort succeeds, the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Park will become one of the first logged-over areas in the USA to have been restored through a Native American ethic of land stewardship.  
*Source: Audubon*, March–April 1996, 18 & 20.

### Turtle-Safe™ shrimp

Earth Island Institute's Sea Turtle Restoration Project has launched a turtle-safe label for shrimp to enable consumers to support fishermen who use fishing gear that does not kill turtles. Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) are required by law in the USA but some fishermen close the trap door that allows the turtles to escape. The USA also still imports shrimp from countries that do not require TEDs; the death toll from the shrimp fleets of these 60-plus nations is estimated to exceed 100,000 turtles a year. The turtle-safe programme has started with 36 Georgia fishermen and four docks; distributors in San Francisco, Boston

and Denver are carrying Turtle-Safe™ shrimp and selling it to restaurants and retail outlets.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, January 1996, No. 72, 24–25.

### Opposition to dredging

A campaign has been started to oppose dredging of the Big Sunflower River in Mississippi, USA. Conservationists say that dredging would eliminate 8–10 million freshwater mussels and that the 31 species involved, including some that are endangered, are an important renewable resource. There are fears that dredging would also open the upper reaches of the river to increased boat traffic and increase the risk of introducing alien zebra mussels, which are usually spread via commercial barges and recreational boats. The Big Sunflower is one of the few remaining rivers in the USA free of zebra mussels.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 32 (4), 325.

### Butterfly dealer's light sentence

John Kemner from Texas, USA, was fined \$500 and given 3 years probation after pleading guilty to smuggling 30,000 Mexican butterflies, moths and beetles (many of them endangered) into the USA in violation of the Lacey Act. Many of the illegally collected insects were sold to collectors and museums.

Source: *Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly*, 44 (4), 13.

### Mystery illness kills manatees

A mystery epidemic had killed 131 manatees *Trichechus manatus* in the Florida, USA, by mid-April and more were being washed ashore daily. Adding

these deaths to those from other causes puts the total of manatee deaths at 213 – seven more than in the whole of 1990, the worst year on record. Post-mortems have shown that the animals died of pneumonia but the cause of the disease has not been identified. So far the deaths have been restricted to a limited area along the west coast of Florida and manatees in other areas may not be threatened, but the loss of 213 of Florida's estimated 2600 individuals is giving great cause for concern.

Source: *New Scientist*, 20 April 1996, 11.

### Bird smuggler pleads guilty

Tony Silva, who gained an international reputation as a protector of rare parrots and macaws, pleaded guilty in February to smuggling rare wild birds into the USA (see *Oryx*, 30 [2], 99). Between 1985 and 1994 Silva imported more than 185 birds, including endangered hyacinth macaws *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*, violating the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the US Lacey Act, the US Endangered Species Act and several foreign wildlife protection laws.

Source: *Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly*, 44 (4), 13.

### New hope for Florida panther

The Florida panther *Felis concolor coryi* faces many threats – habitat loss and fragmentation, collisions with motor vehicles, environmental contaminants, reduced prey availability and human disturbance – but with a single population of 30–50 adults, the most serious threat is its eroded gene pool. A captive-breeding

programme, which started in 1991, was halted in 1992 when it was realized that more aggressive action was needed to restore genetic viability. In 1995 eight females of the most closely related subspecies *F. c. stanleyana* from Texas were released into Florida. Biologists will monitor the introduced animals and their offspring to determine if they promote fertility, genetic diversity and overall health in the population.

Source: *Endangered Species Bulletin*, March/April 1996, 10–11.

### Woodpecker extinct?

A 13-month survey of the pine forests of the Sierra Madre Occidental in north-west Mexico has failed to find the imperial woodpecker *Campephilus imperialis*, dashing hopes that there were still old-growth forests sufficiently large for this bird, the largest woodpecker in the world. The species was once distributed throughout the Sierra Madre Occidental but the almost total destruction of old-growth pine forest combined with hunting caused a catastrophic decline. The species has not been recorded with certainty since 1958. The pine forests are also notable for several other endemic animals and the survey identified three priority areas that require urgent conservation action to safeguard the best remnants of old-growth forest and their fauna. All are unprotected and partly threatened by logging concessions.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 18 (1), 2.

### Agreement to protect cave invertebrates

Two of Hawaii's endangered endemic cave invertebrates – blind Kaua'i cave wolf spider

*Adelecosa anops* and the Kaua'i amphipod *Spelaeorchestia koloana* – will benefit from an agreement between a private developer and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Only two populations of the spider and four of the amphipod are known, all within a 10-sq-km area of privately owned land on the southern coast of Kaua'i. The best two caves are owned by the Kukui'ula Development Company, which is developing a residential community on the site. The company has agreed to install grilles over the cave entrances to restrict human access and to restore the cave habitat. A long-term conservation agreement is being worked out, the first such agreement between a private developer in Hawaii and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Source: *'Elepaio*, February 1996, 6 (1), 4.

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## CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

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### Belize protected area management

The Government of Belize, the Forest Department and the Belize Audubon Society (BAS) signed an agreement on 15 November 1995 to manage jointly and develop six protected areas: Half Moon Caye Natural Monument, Crooked Tree and Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuaries, Guanacaste and Blue Hole National Parks, and Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve. The BAS will be responsible for day-to-day management and the Government and Forest Department for providing infrastructure and security.

Source: *BAS Newsletter*, October–December 1995, 7.

### Loggers from the East in Belize

Belize's natural wealth and growing ecotourism industry may be at risk from Far Eastern loggers. In 1995 the Minister for Natural Resources gave Atlantic Industries, a venture financed from Hong Kong and Singapore, a 20-year licence to log 10,000 ha in the Columbia River and Maya Mountains forest reserves in Toledo District, despite the Forest Department having filed 11 objections. The area has one of the only large continuous tracts of relatively undisturbed evergreen forest in Central America. Under its licence Atlantic Industries is meant to employ a sustainable forest management plan, consult with Maya people (who want to log the forest sustainably using mules rather than bulldozers), observe 83 guidelines of good practice and keep out of protected areas. Despite the fact that the company has breached the licence conditions the Prime Minister has refused to revoke the concession.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, April 1996, 59.

### Boxes for Bahama swallow

One of the Bahama Islands' three endemic species, the Bahama swallow *Tachycineta cyaneoviridis*, has been the subject of an experimental recovery effort. Although populations are believed to be stable, there is concern for its future because the pine forests that provide breeding cavities are under threat from logging and other uses. As part of the conservation programme 227 nest boxes have been placed at several sites on Grand Bahama, including mangrove forests, farm fields, golf courses, stands of dead pine and a missile-

tracking base. In 1995 three of the boxes were occupied and one pair raised two broods.

Source: *El Pitirre*, Winter 1996, 18.

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## SOUTH AMERICA

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### Pantanal safer

A plan to build a 3442-km waterway (the Hidrovia Paraguay–Parana project), connecting two rivers and opening the way for sea-going ships to travel through Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina, has been greatly modified as a result of representations from conservation organizations. The Intergovernmental Commission on Hidrovia has announced that there will be no engineering work in the Pantanal, a wetland of global importance located on the borders of Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, and no dredging, straightening of bends or other construction that could harm the wetlands.

Source: *People & the Planet*, 5 (2), 28.

### Cellulose plant threatens Chilean wetland

The Rio Cruces Sanctuary in Chile, the country's only Ramsar site, is at risk from a proposed cellulose processing plant 15 km away. The plant would take water from the Cruces River and release it back into the river at a higher temperature and possibly carrying pollutants. The volume of water used could seriously reduce the river flow, particularly in summer. The area is due to be incorporated into the National System of Protected Wild Areas and supports large populations of breeding birds, including black-necked swan

*Cygnus melanacoryphus*, snowy-crowned tern *Sterna trudeaui* and white-necked heron *Ardea cocoi*.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 18 (1), 4.

## AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND/ANTARCTICA

### White shark protection

The Australian Marine Conservation Society and the Australian Seafood Industry Council have been actively promoting the protection of the white shark *Carcharodon carcharias* by seeking an end to existing, and proposed, targeted fishing by requesting fisheries agencies to protect the species under appropriate legislation. In January the Tasmanian State Parliament announced that the species had been officially listed as protected in Tasmanian waters and it is hoped that other states will follow suit. A new threat to sharks has arisen from changing methods of catching tuna in South Australia. Tuna caught in circular nets offshore are being towed alive to Port Lincoln for fattening. It is reported that the tuna attract predatory sharks – mainly white sharks and bronze whalers *Carcharhinus brachyurus* – and that these are shot to protect the tuna.

Source: *Shark News*, No. 6, 11.

### Crocodile numbers soar

Saltwater crocodile *Crocodylus porosus* numbers in Australia have soared since the species was protected in the early 1970s. There are an estimated 70,000 crocodiles in Northern Territory and unknown numbers in Queensland and Western Australia. Threats to

human safety have prompted calls for culling or safari-style hunting but the federal Minister of the Environment believes that the current programme, which allows for killing of problem crocodiles, is adequate to protect humans. A form of culling is already practised in Northern Territory, where 15,000 crocodile eggs are removed each year.

Source: *Crocodile Specialist Group Newsletter*, 15 (1), 6.

### Stilt success

The black stilt *Himantopus novaeseelandiae*, one of New Zealand's endemic birds that declined as a result of the introduction of mammalian ground predators, is recovering from a low of 30 adult birds in the early 1980s. Today there are 70 adults (12 pairs) on the wetlands of the Mackenzie Basin, South Canterbury, South Island, the increase being due to an intensive management programme – replacing eggs with dummies and artificially incubating them before returning the hatchlings to their parents, trapping nest sites for predators and captive-breeding and release of young birds.

Source: *Reintroduction News*, No. 11, December 1995, 5–6.

### New weta

A new species of tusked weta has been discovered in the Raukumara Range near East Cape, New Zealand. Although only one specimen has been found, it is believed to be a new species because it lacks the usual ridges on the tusks for calling and has different leg markings. Tusked weta have only recently been recognized as a distinct group; only two other species are known, one from scattered sites in Northland and the other (still

undescribed) from Middle Mercury Island. They are distinguished from other weta by the long curved tusks projecting from the male's jaws.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, February 1996, 4.

### Setback for weka

A New Zealand conservation project to restore weka *Gallirallus australis greyi* to North Island's mainland has suffered a setback after 18 months of successful breeding and release of these endemic birds. At the end of 1995 dead and mauled weka were found at Karangahahe near Waihi, victims of introduced ferrets. Only four weka have been located at the site since. Forest & Bird is now seeking a safer release site for the wekas that its members are breeding and is urging the Department of Conservation to find an island site free of ferrets.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, February 1996, 5–6.

### A struggle for a skink

Efforts to reintroduce Whitaker's skink *Cyclodina whitakeri* on Korapuki Island, New Zealand, had to overcome formidable difficulties. The 20-cm-long lizard emerges from its burrows to feed only on the warmest nights of the year and is difficult to catch. The females also have a low reproductive output. Twenty-five skinks from Middle Island, site of the the largest of the three remaining wild populations, were released on Korapuki in 1988 after it was cleared of rats and rabbits. In 1995 the number of skinks born there exceeded the number of original releases for the first time. A recovery plan aims to double the number of populations from three to six by 1997 and there are

several island restoration projects under way in the species's former range.

Source: *Reintroduction News*, No. 11, December 1995, 3–4.

### Native plants in the city

A community group in Christchurch, New Zealand, is encouraging residents of the city to restore indigenous plants. Residents can locate their street on a map in a booklet, note what ecosystem it is in and obtain the associated plant card, which lists trees, shrubs and other plants that once grew there.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, February 1996, 5.

### Saving a giant grass

The Chatham island toetoe *Cortadena turbana* is a giant grass endemic to the Chatham Islands, 800 km east of New Zealand. With only 140 individuals left in the wild it is regarded as Critically Endangered; major threats include destruction of its wetland habitat, cattle grazing, clearance for agriculture and potential hybridization with other *Cortadena* spp. introduced for shelterbelts. Under a government recovery programme, c. 150 plants have been propagated from seed and over 100 were planted out on privately owned land on the island in January. Some sites are being fenced and an education programme is planned. A living genetic collection is also being established in New Zealand.

Source: *Species*, No. 25, 17.

### Too many sea lions killed

More than 500 Hooker's sea lions *Phocarcos hookeri*, the world's rarest sea lion species, were killed in squid trawler

nets off the Auckland Islands in the last 8 years. For the 1996 fishing season, 1 February–mid-April, the New Zealand Government proposed a kill quota of 62 sea lions, including 32 females. If either of these figures is exceeded the fishery will be closed but conservationists say that the limit was exceeded in 1995 and late reporting by the Fishing Industry Board meant that the season had almost finished and no action was taken. The industry wants the limit raised to over 150 and has said that it will oppose any attempt to close the fishery. Conservationists have long argued that the marine mammal sanctuary around the Auckland Islands should be extended out to 100 km and regulations introduced where, for each fishery, a plan is required to reduce marine mammal deaths to nearly 0 over 7 years. The technology exists to do this – using squid jiggers rather than trawlers.

Source: *Conservation News* (*Forest & Bird*), February 1996, 4.

### Flycatcher recovery

Once widespread throughout swamp taro patches of lowland Rarotonga in the Cook Islands of the South Pacific, the kakerori or endemic Rarotonga flycatcher *Pomarea dimidiata* is today confined to an area of less than 150 ha in the south-east of the island. After a census in 1987 revealed that fewer than 40 flycatchers remained, an experimental recovery programme was started in 1989. A combination of rat poisoning and tree banding reversed the decline, leading to 78 per cent of nests being successful compared with 15 per cent when there was no assistance. There has also been a marked decrease in adult mortality; the average life expectancy of

kakerori has increased from 3.6 to over 15 years. There are now over 100 flycatchers compared with an all-time low of 29 in 1989.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, February 1996, 31.

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## OBITUARIES

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**Hugh Lamprey**, wildlife conservationist, died on 10 February 1996, aged 67. He spent his working life in Africa, the first part as biologist in Tanganyika's Game Department, as first Principal of the College of African Wildlife Management at Mweka in Tanzania and as Director of the Serengeti Research Institute. Later he was based in Nairobi, working for Unesco, UNEP, WWF and IUCN. For his services to conservation he was awarded the Order of the Golden Ark in 1987 and an OBE in 1990.

**Sir William Wilkinson**, Chairman of the UK Nature Conservancy Council between 1983 and 1991, died on 12 April 1996, aged 63. After a successful career in industry and merchant banking, he turned his energy into what had always been his first love – wildlife and its protection. During the 1960s he helped found the Ornithological Society of Turkey, which became the Ornithological Society of the Middle East under his chairmanship. He was a council member and, later, Treasurer of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and in 1983 was appointed Chairman of the NCC. He was awarded a knighthood for his services in 1989. He fought the Environment Protection Act

1990, which paved the way for the dismantling of the NCC and after its demise devoted himself to supporting many UK voluntary conservation organizations.

Source: *The Times*, 18 April 1996.

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## NEW GROUPS

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### Wetlands International

A new global organization for wetland conservation, Wetlands International, has been created by the integration of three existing wetland conservation bodies: International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB), Asian Wetland Bureau; and Wetlands for the Americas. Wetlands International has charitable status and is governed by a global board comprising representatives of member countries, international organizations and wetland specialists. There are separate Regional Councils for Asia/Pacific, Africa/Europe/Middle East and the Americas. Overall co-ordination is provided by the former IWRB at Slimbridge, UK under Dr Mike Moser. Tel: +44 1453 890624; Fax: +44 1453 890697; e-mail: iwrb@va.wsl.ac.uk

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## OPPORTUNITIES

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### Tropical forest conservation in Uganda

The Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation of Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda offers accommodation and logistic support to visiting researchers and is keen to

establish collaborative links with research institutions world-wide in order to develop a structured research programme focusing on many aspects of wildlife ecology, conservation, protected area management. For further information contact: Simon Jennings, Director, Institute for Tropical Forest Conservation, PO Box 7487 Kampala, Uganda.

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## MEETINGS

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**Second International Symposium on Conserving Lepidoptera in a Changing Environment.** 6–8 September 1996, University of Warwick, UK. Contact: Dr Andrew S. Pullin, Department of Biological Sciences, Keele University, Staffs ST5 5BG. Fax: +44 1782 630007; e-mail: bia05@keele.ac.uk

**Ivy Zoos Symposium: An International Meeting on the Experience and Changing Role of Traditional Zoos.** 8–12 September 1996. Budapest, Hungary. Contact: Ivy Zoos Symposium Secretariat, Dr Ildikó Kemenes, Budapest Zoo and Botanical Garden, H 1371 Budapest 5, Pf. 469, Hungary. Tel: 36 1 1413615 or 36 1 3436883; Fax: 36 1 2681966 or 36 1 3430059.

**WILDSCREEN 96. Natural History Film and Television Festival.** 12–18 October 1996, Bristol, UK. Contact: WILDSCREEN 96, 15 Whiteladies Road, Bristol BS8 1PB, UK. Tel: +44 (0) 117 973 3082; Fax: +44 (0) 117 923 9416; e-mail: wildscreen@gn.apc.org

**Pan-Asian Ornithological Congress and BirdLife Asia**

**Conference.** 9–17 November 1996, Bangalore, India. Contact: Dr V. S. Vijayan, National Co-ordinator, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Kalampayan PO, Coimbatore 641 010, Tamil Nadu, India. Tel: (+) 091 422 807953, 807972, 807983; Fax: (+) 091 422 807953; e-mail: centre@sacon.ernet.in

**Molluscan Conservation Conference.** 19–21 November 1966, Cardiff, UK. Contact: Mary Seddon, Curator, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff CF1 3NP, UK. Tel: +44 1222 397951 exr 244; fax: +44 1222 239009; e-mail: seddonm@cardiff.ac.uk

**International Conference on Camelids: Science and Productivity.** 15–19 December 1996, Eliat, Israel. Contact: Conference Secretariat, Dan Knassim Ltd, PO Box 1931, Ramat-Gan 52118, Israel. Tel: 972 3 6133340; Fax: 972 3 6133341.

**Second World Conference on Mountain Ungulates.** 9–11 May 1997, Saint Vincent (Aosta), Italy. Contact: Dr Vittorio Peracino, Ente Autonomo Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso, Via delle Rocca 47, 10123 Torino, Italy. Tel: 39 11 8171187 or 835839; Fax: 39 11 8121305, or Professor Sandro Lovari, Department of Evolutionary Biology, Via P. A. Mattioli 4, 53100 Siena, Italy. Tel: 39 577 298901; Fax: 39 577 298898; e-mail: lovari@unisi.it

**Third World Congress of Herpetology.** 2–10 August 1997, Prague, Czech Republic. Contact: c/o Czech Medical Association, J. E. Purkyne, Congress Department, PO Box 88, Sokolská 31, 120 26 Praha 2, Czech Republic; Tel: 42 2 294610 or 42 2 24216836.