

## International

**Setback for Biodiversity Convention**

An Extraordinary Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in 1999 in Cartagena, Colombia, failed to agree on a legally binding protocol on the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms that may have an adverse effect on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Many NGO participants feel that the environmental agenda of the CBD is becoming more dominated by trade implications.

Source: *Birdlife Update*, April 1999, 2.

**Turtle Convention needs parties**

Mexico is on the way to becoming the second country to ratify the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles. Venezuela was the first country to ratify the Convention, which was opened for signing in December 1996. At least eight ratifications are needed before the treaty will come into force.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, 1999, No. 85, 27.

**Human effects on coral reefs**

A special survey protocol, Reef Check, designed to be used by volunteer recreational divers, trained and led by marine scientists, and based on the use of easily identified indicator organisms, was used at 315 reefs in 31 countries in 1997. It revealed that few reefs remain unaffected by humans. Overfishing has reduced fish and invertebrate indicator organisms to low levels at most reefs. Reef corals were found to be in the best condition in the Red Sea.

Source: Hodgson, G. (1999) *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 38(5), 345–355.

**World Trade Organization threat to forests**

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is reported to be negotiating with industry groups to create a global

agreement for free trade in forest products. The agreement would outlaw environmental and trade controls simply because corporations view them as barriers to trade. It would undoubtedly increase the logging and consumption of forests globally. In November 1999, leaders of the WTO's 134 member countries will meet, in Seattle, in order to finalize the forest products agreement. Environmental safeguards that could be invalidated by the agreement include import restrictions on forest products that carry invasive pests, certification or eco-labelling schemes and 'unreasonably' high standards for forest management and production.

Source: *Taiga News*, 1999, No. 27, 1 & 9–10.

**Norwegians to hunt minke whales**

On 3 May 1999 the Norwegian whaling season opened with a fleet of 36 boats set to hunt a 'self-awarded' quota of 753 minke whales *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*, the highest number since the moratorium on commercial whaling came into force in 1986. One week before, a Japanese fleet returned with 389 minke whales, which were killed in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. Norway resumed commercial whaling in defiance of the moratorium in 1993 and since then has killed 2238 minke whales in the Barents Sea, the Norwegian Sea and the North Sea. Norway whales under the formal objection that it lodged to the International Whaling Commission's moratorium in 1992 and has ignored the Commission's annual resolutions to stop.

Source: WWF, 3 May 1999.

Web: <http://www.panda.org>

**IWC reasserts role as world authority on whale management**

At the 51st meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in May 1999 in Grenada, the majority of delegates rejected virtually every proposal by whaling nations Japan and Norway to ease restrictions on commercial whaling. The most significant vote was the passage of a

resolution reasserting the IWC's role as the world authority on whale management, which sends a strong message to officials of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to take its cue from the IWC on all matters pertaining to whales. Japan and Norway are expected to push for a lifting of the ban on international trade in whale meat at the April 2000 meeting of CITES. Another key vote was the defeat of Japan's motion to reopen the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary to whale hunting.

Source: *Habitat*, 1999, 35(6), 1.

**More humpback whales than expected**

There are 10,600 Atlantic humpback whales *Megaptera novaeangliae*, almost twice the previous estimate. This could indicate population growth or could be the result of more detailed field studies. The most recent census involved 12 scientists, spending a total of 666 days at sea on 28 vessels in breeding grounds in the West Indies and five feeding grounds in Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and the USA.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, 1999, 102(3), 10.

**Eco-labelling of forest products**

The International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW) and WWF International have agreed to collaborate on a range of forest issues. One of the first actions will be to devise guidelines on eco-labelling. The guidelines will allow both organizations to evaluate the eco-labelling schemes that best address the environmental and social concerns relating to the growing demands for forest products.

Source: WWF, 23 June 1999.

Web: <http://www.panda.org>

**Global warming impact on oceans**

A new report by WWF-US says that global warming is disrupting ocean life from the tropics to the poles, threatening the survival of large numbers of species. Worst impacted

are those species at higher latitudes where the warming is most extreme: some populations of north Pacific salmon *Oncorhynchus* spp. have crashed over the last 2 years as ocean temperatures in the region rose 5–6 °C higher than normal in 1997 and remained 2 °C warmer than normal in 1998. Food shortages, linked to warming oceans, have also led to hundreds of thousands of seabird deaths.

Source: Mathews-Amos, A. & Berntson, E.A. (1999) *Turning up the Heat: How Global Warming Threatens Life in the Sea*. Web: WWF: <http://www.panda.org>

#### Musk deer hunt unsustainable

Musk deer *Moschus* spp. are declining fast in nearly all of the 13 countries where they occur in Asia and eastern parts of Russia, as a result of the high demand for musk (from the male scent glands) for medicines and perfumes. It is one of the most expensive natural products with a retail value three to five times higher than that of gold. Russia is a major supplier, while France, Germany and Switzerland are major importers. The latter two countries re-export raw musk to Hong Kong, South Korea and other countries. In Europe alone the amount of raw musk imported legally in the past two decades represents the loss of tens of thousands of wild musk deer and imports appear to be increasing. Widespread illegal trade is occurring without the required CITES permits and the European Union is in the process of suspending imports from Russia until stronger safeguards are in place.

Source: *On the Scent—The Uses of Musk and Europe's Role in its Trade*. TRAFFIC Europe, 6 July 1999.

Web: <http://www.traffic.org>

## Europe

#### European butterflies under threat

A review of the conservation status of all 576 species of butterflies in Europe showed that 69 species are threatened—17 at a global level and 52 at a European level. The main threats come from agricultural changes and land development.

Source: *Naturopa*, 1999, No. 90, 29.

#### New threat from plant pathogen hybrids

Plant disease epidemics resulting from the introduction of exotic fungal plant pathogens are well known. An associated risk—that accelerated pathogen evolution may be occurring as a result of genetic exchange between introduced, or introduced and resident, fungal pathogens—is largely unrecognized. Genetic and cytological analyses have shown that a new, aggressive *Phytophthora* pathogen of alder trees *Alnus* spp. in Europe comprises a range of heteroploid–interspecific hybrids involving a *Phytophthora cambivora*-like species and an unknown taxon similar to *Phytophthora fragariae*. They appear to be of recent origin and their evolution is continuing. The likelihood of such evolutionary events may be increasing as world trade in plants intensifies.

Source: Brasier, C.M. et al. (1999) *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 96, 5878–5883.

#### Wolves saved

A court has ruled against the culling of the only pair of wolves *Canis lupus* in southern Norway because it would have been a violation of the Bern Convention.

Source: *Taiga News*, 1999, No. 27, 4.

#### Action to stop logging in Finland

Greenpeace activists are trying to stop the further destruction of old-growth forests in Kukkuri, north-east Finland, by the state-owned Forest and Park Service (FPS). Only 2–6 per cent of forests in Finland are protected and local NGOs have identified areas where old-growth should be protected, but the FPS refuses to discuss the issue. The FPS plans to log several old-growth forests this year.

Source: *Taiga News*, 1999, No. 27, 4.

#### Public support for UK wildlife legislation reform

Conservationists in the UK are pressing for reform of wildlife legislation. In April 250,000 pledges of public support for strengthening the UK's Wildlife and Countryside Act were delivered to the Deputy Prime Minister.

Source: *Habitat*, 1999, 35(6), 4.

#### Encouraging UK farmers to create wildlife habitats

New incentives have been introduced by the UK government for farmers to recreate and manage heathland, to create overwinter stubbles for birds, to manage woodland and to conserve meadowland. The incentives apply in six Environmentally Sensitive Areas: Dartmoor, Essex Coast, Blackdown Hills, Cotswold Hills, Shropshire Hills and Upper Thames tributaries.

Source: *Habitat*, 1999, 35(6), 3.

#### UK woodland management for wildlife

The UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS), a joint venture between the government, the forestry industry and WWF-UK, will make UK forests among the best managed for wildlife in the world. Under the scheme, single-species plantations will be restructured into diverse multi-species forests and within a year the Forestry Commission will certify its entire 8000-sq-km estate. It is expected that, as a result of UKWAS, UK-produced timber that carries the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) eco-label will rise from 1 to 75 per cent, the highest percentage of FSC-certified timber of any country in the world.

Source: *Habitat*, 1999, 35(7), 2–3.

#### Boycott of Vietnamese furniture

In the UK, Friends of the Earth are urging people not to buy garden furniture labelled to be of Vietnamese origin. The timber probably comes from Cambodia where the country's forests are being destroyed to fund the Cambodian military.

Source: *Habitat*, 1999, 35(5), 5.

#### Few bitterns left in UK

Counts in 1999 of the booming calls of the male bittern *Botaurus stellaris* in the UK suggest that numbers are dangerously low. The main stronghold in East Anglia has only eight or nine birds, with three at Leighton Moss reserve and a further two in other English counties.

Source: *Habitat*, 1999, 35(5), 4.

#### Manx shearwater on Welsh islands

The islands of Skomer, Skokholm and Middleholm, off the UK's Welsh coast, are the most important breeding sites for the Manx shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*. A survey has revealed that

c. 150,000 pairs breed there, 50 per cent of the world population. The species is the only bird breeding in the UK to migrate to South America, where it winters in the South Atlantic, off Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.  
 Source: *Habitat*, 1999, 35(5), 2.

#### Otter and water vole restoration in Dorset

Otters *Lutra lutra* are moving into seven new holts, built in favourable habitat in rivers in Dorset, thanks to a joint effort by the UK Environment Agency, the Dorset Wildlife Trust and local landowners. Old holts are also being repaired, vegetation cover is being restored and choked channels are being cleared to benefit water voles *Arvicola terrestris*.

Source: *Habitat*, 1999, 35(5), 2.

#### Poland restores pond turtle

Poland has been protecting the European pond turtle *Emys orbicularis* for almost 80 years and has the largest surviving population in Europe. Under its restoration programme for the species it has released 349 captive-bred individuals near the town of Radom and 68 near Zwolen. Once widespread in Europe, from the Mediterranean to Denmark and Lithuania, the species started to disappear in the 1950s as a result of habitat destruction: today only 500–600 wild turtles survive in their former range.

Source: Polish Tourist Office, press release, June 1999.

#### Geese dying in Spain

Greylag geese *Anser anser* wintering off the Coto Doñana National Park in Spain are dying. It is suspected that the cause is lead and cadmium poisoning from the collapse of the mine-tailings dam, which polluted the River Guadiamar (see *Oryx*, 32[3], 179).

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 1999, 38(5), 337.

#### CITES lifts trade ban on Greece

Officials for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) have withdrawn their August 1998 recommendation for countries to ban trade with Greece in wildlife covered by the Convention. This follows action by Greece to adopt new

legislation to implement the convention, to designate a CITES Scientific Authority and to reduce the number of ports for wildlife entering the country.

Source: TRAFFIC, 28 June 1999.

Web: <http://www.traffic.org>

### North Eurasia

#### Update on Russian forests

In February 1998, Russia's Supreme Court declared that a set of federal decrees to declassify a number of protected forests were illegal (see *Oryx*, 32[4], 252). Four days after the ruling new government directives were issued, mandating the transfer of First Group Forests to the lesser status of non-forested lands. The non-governmental law organization, Ecojuris, appealed against these directives and on 12 February 1999 the Russian Supreme Court ruled that the federal directives issued a year earlier were illegal, because they violated the Federal Land Code and the Federal Law on Environmental Impact Assessments. The status of First Group Forests must be reinstated, and in areas where forests have already been exploited additional sections must be added to compensate for lost land.  
 Source: *Russian Conservation News*, 1999, No. 19, 12.

#### Logging in Russian Far East

When environmental regulations became too strict and forest resources too scarce in the US Pacific North West, 10 logging companies formed the Global Forestry Management Group (GFMG) and started logging in the Khabarovsk Region of the Russian Far East in 1994. The GFMG tried to export raw logs into the USA for processing but this was banned because the logs carried exotic pest species. The group shifted exports to Japan and also worked with US sawmills to pressure the US Department of Agriculture to lift the ban and to weaken regulations for unprocessed wood imports.

Source: *Taiga News*, 1999, No. 27, 9.

#### Mining threat in Kuril Islands

Kurilsky Zapovednik (1518 sq km) in the Kuril islands in the Russian Far East is under threat from gold mining. The reserve was established in 1984, the first nature reserve in the Sakhalin Region. Species richness is high: 1215 species of vascular plants and 260 species of birds have been recorded in the area. The area is also important for Steller's sea-lion *Eumetopias jubatus* and fish. Now an open-pit mine is being excavated with explosives to search for gold ore within the protected buffer zone of the reserve and a processing plant is planned near the mouth of a river in the buffer zone. Damaging effects on the environment are already apparent and Russian environmentalists are seeking the help of the international community to stop the mining.

Source: *Biodiversity Briefings from Northern Eurasia* (Supplement to *Russian Conservation News*), 1999, 2(1), 1–12.

### North Africa and Middle East

#### Hunting ban in Ras Al Khaimah

Ras Al Kaimah, one of the seven sheikhdoms of the United Arab Emirates, banned bird and hare *Lepus capensis* hunting in August 1998. Penalties include 2 days in prison for a first offender and 1 month in prison and seizure of equipment for repeat offenders.

Source: *Sandgrouse*, 1999, 21(1), 4.

#### Oryx now safer in Oman

Anti-poaching measures have been strengthened in Oman following the disastrous reduction in numbers of wild oryx *Oryx leucoryx* in recent years (see *Oryx*, 33[2], 168–175) and there has been no poaching since January 1999. The ranger force has been restructured to make it multi-tribal and to move forward on the main recommendations of the Abu Dhabi conference (see *Oryx* 33[3], 200).

Source: Andrew Spalton, Office of the Adviser for Conservation of the Environment, Sultanate of Oman.

### Sub-Saharan Africa

#### Peace Parks acquire new land

The Peace Parks Foundation (see *Oryx*, 32[1], 22) has purchased an 865-ha farm, Rhodesdrift, on the Limpopo River near the Pontdrif border post between South Africa and Botswana. This will form the western boundary of the South African National Parks' proposed Angola/Limpopo Valley Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA). This TFCA is being consolidated by extending the newly proclaimed Vhembe/Dongola National Park, incorporating farms through purchase and partnership arrangements.

Source: *Africa: Environment and Wildlife*, January–February 1999, 16–17.

#### Special eland calf for South Africa

In December 1998 an eland *Tragelaphus oryx* was born in Johannesburg Zoo, South Africa, the first animal in Africa to be conceived as a result of artificial insemination using sperm taken from a male animal that had died in the wild. While the eland is not a threatened species, the successful birth demonstrates that sperm received from a recently dead male animal (wild or captive) can be stored and used to produce offspring—an additional conservation tool that can be used to conserve rare and endangered wildlife species.

Source: *Endangered Wildlife*, 1999, No. 31, 10–13.

#### Gentle lemur poaching

The wild population of the Alaotran gentle lemur *Haplemur griseus alaotrensis* in Madagascar has fallen by c. 30 per cent in the last 5 years because of poaching. The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust is tackling the problem through community education programmes.

Source: *On the Edge*, 1999, No. 85, 8.

### South and South East Asia

#### Tiger Reserves in India under threat

India's Palamau and Valmiki Tiger Reserves are collapsing as a result of the failure of the national and state governments to release funds. Staff have not been paid for 15 months. A

local NGO, the Nature Conservation Society (NCS) of Daltonganj, has formed local Tiger Protection Committees to draw young people into monitoring poaching and providing information on cattle kills. The cattle compensation scheme, implemented through NCS since June 1998, in which livestock owners are paid compensation immediately for cattle killed by tigers or leopards, has been welcomed by villagers. The NCS is also collecting donations from the general public for the maintenance of grassland and the protection of crops from elephants.

Source: *TigerLink News*, 1999, 5(1), 4.

#### New tree from Bengal

A new species of tree has been described from evergreen forest in West Bengal—*Goniothalamus shraddhae* in the family Annonaceae. It is evergreen and bushy, closely allied to *G. ridleyi*, and appears to be very rare. Source: Dutta, S.R. & Almeida, S.M. (1998) *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, 1998, 95(3), 488–490.

#### Turtles return to Orissa

Mass nesting by tens of thousands of endangered olive ridley turtles *Lepidochelys olivacea* occurred in 1999 on the beaches of Orissa on the east coast of India. Mass nesting had not taken place for 3 years and conservationists hailed the turtles' return as the fruit of a massive protection exercise by volunteer groups and government departments against drowning of turtles in illegally operated trawl fisheries. The Wildlife Institute of India has recorded c. 40,000 dead turtles washed ashore there over the past 4 years.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, 1999, No. 85, 20.

#### Deforestation in Myanmar

The rate of deforestation in Myanmar has more than doubled since the State Law and Order Restoration Council took control of the country in 1988. This has been mainly because of an increase in logging in border areas. Timber exports have helped to maintain the regime through doubling the size of the army.

Source: *Arborvitae*, *The IUCN/WWF Forest Conservation Newsletter*, 1999, No. 11, 4.

#### Endemic Bird Area in Vietnam

A new Endemic Bird Area has been discovered at Ngoc Linh, the highest mountain in the western highlands of Vietnam. Two new bird species have been found there: black-crowned barwing *Actinodura sodangorum* and golden-winged laughing thrush *Garrulax ngoclinhensis*. Part of Ngoc Linh is a proposed nature reserve and a management plan is now being prepared.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 1999, 21(2), 2.

#### Kalimantan peat swamp forests saved

Plans to convert 1 million ha of Central Kalimantan peat swamp forests into rice fields and plantations were officially abandoned in April when the relevant Indonesian presidential decrees were withdrawn and the land returned to the control of the forestry and plantations industry. A great deal of damage had already been done to the forests and to the Dayak communities that had been displaced. Illegal loggers have also invaded the area using the drainage canals to transport stolen logs and have taken over from the project contractors as the main agent of environmental destruction. It is now planned that the land would become part protected area, part agriculture and part plantation.

Source: *Down to Earth*, 1999, No. 41, 8.

#### Orang-utans in jeopardy

The Suaq Balimbing Research Station in Gunung Leuser National Park is being logged illegally in spite of repeated requests from station workers to the authorities to enforce the law. The station has a very high density of orang-utans *Pongo pygmaeus albus* as well as four species of monkeys (*Macaca fascicularis*, *M. nemestrina*, *Presbytis thomasi* and *P. crisatata*), two species of gibbon (*Hylobates lar* and *H. syndactylus*), plus tigers *Panthera tigris sumatrae*, bears *Helarctos malayensis* and wild pigs *Babirusa babirusa*.

Source: Michelle Y. Merrill, Department of Biological Anthropology and Anatomy, Duke University, NC, USA.

#### Mining activities destroy Indonesian forests

The South Kalimantan branch of an environmental NGO, WALHI, is protesting about mining activities in

Indonesian forests. A gold and silver mine in Sumatra, operated by PT Barisan Tropical Mining, owned by the Australian Company Laverton Gold NL, has polluted the River Tiku, which provides local people with water and fish, and affected forest wildlife adversely. In South Kalimantan, coal mining on Sebu Island has damaged 'protected' forests. The Australian company, Straits Resources Limited, has been mining coal for over a year at an open cast mine. WALHI is calling for the decree changing the forest's status to be revoked, for all mining to be stopped and for the reclamation of areas already exploited.

Source: *Down to Earth*, 1999, No. 41, 7.

#### Report on orang-utan crisis

The UK-based Environmental Investigation Agency has reported on the ecological crisis in Borneo during the El Niño event of 1997/98. The report provides an account of the relationship between the decline of the orang-utan *Pongo pygmaeus* population and intensive deforestation. It includes information on orang-utan status, forest fires and forest destruction as a result of the expansion of the palm-oil industry, as well as recommendations for action. The report is available from EIA, 69 Old Street, London EC1V 9HX; e-mail: eiauk@apc.org

Source: *Pongo Quest*, 1999, 9(1), 9.

### East Asia

#### Antelope on edge of extinction

The Tibetan antelope *Pantholops hodgsonii* is on the verge of extinction as a result of hunting, according to a report by the Chinese Government. The antelopes live at altitudes over 5000 m and are hunted for their underwool (shahtoosh). On 8 November 1998 Zhaba Duoje, China's leading protector of the antelope, was found shot dead at his home in Qinghai Province—presumably by poachers. He manned a wildlife protection centre in Hoh Xil in the north-western corner of the Qinghai-Tibet plateau. The centre was named after his predecessor Gyaisang Soinamdaje, who was killed in a fight with poachers 4 years ago.

Source: *TigerLink News*, 5(1), 25.

#### Falcon trade increasing

Poaching of saker falcons *Falco cherrug* for the falconry trade is increasing in China. Several hundred poachers and traffickers are believed to be active in Xinjiang alone; on one occasion c. 150 poachers were discovered catching falcons in Bayanbulak Nature Reserve. Source: *World Birdwatch*, 21(2), 5.

#### Hong Kong wetland destroyed

Sam Chung Marsh, one of Hong Kong's five most valuable wetlands in conservation terms, has been almost completely destroyed by earth-moving works, which have drained it and denuded it of vegetation. It was home to the rare black paradise fish *Macropodus concolor*, which does not occur outside of Hong Kong, and one of the few sites where the bog orchid *Liparis ferruginea* occurred. In March scientists rescued 202 individuals of the fish, most of them stranded in a 30-m-long ditch. They are being kept in captivity until a suitable release site is found and in the meantime captive breeding is under way. Sam Chung is owned by a private developer, who bought it with the long-term aim of building a golf course. It was not under any form of legal protection. Source: *Porcupine*, 1999, No. 19, 1 & 28–30.

#### Reef fish depleted for Hong Kong restaurants

Hong Kong is the world's largest importer of reef fish and demand is threatening some species. Among the c. 30,000 tonnes of live fish imported annually are species that are classified as Vulnerable by IUCN—The World Conservation Union. They include the humphead wrasse *Cheilinus undulatus* and giant grouper *Epinephelus lanceolatus*, which are among the 12 most popular fish in Hong Kong restaurants. The live reef fish industry in Hong Kong is worth \$US500 million, with consumers willing to pay up to \$US175/kg for smaller individuals of giant grouper. Most of the fish imported are immature.

Source: *The Hong Kong Trade in Live Reef Fish for Food*, TRAFFIC East Asia/WWF Hong Kong, 17 June 1999. Web: <http://www.traffic.org>

#### Taiwan regulates CITES plants

On 16 July 1998 Taiwan's Board of Foreign Trade announced the addition of all CITES Appendix I- and II-listed plant species to the list of commodities subject to import and export restrictions. While Taiwan cannot be Party to CITES in its own right, because it is not recognized as a sovereign state by the United Nations, it has regulated the import and export of most CITES-listed fauna since the introduction of its Wildlife Conservation Law in 1989.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, 1999, 17(3), 95.

#### Tiger products in Japan

TRAFFIC East Asia is continuing to push for legislative reform in Japan after a new survey showed the widespread availability of tiger products on the domestic market. Existing government regulations cover only tiger hair, fur and claws, and products derived from these, as well as products classified as pharmaceuticals. Many products on sale claim to contain tiger bone and are not classified as pharmaceuticals. Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches*, 1999, No. 11, 3.

#### Sea eagles on the move

Steller's sea eagles *Haliaeetus pelagicus* in Japan are moving inland because of changes in the availability of fish on the east coast of Hokkaido and on the southern Kuril Islands. As they turn to scavenging on sika deer *Cervus nippon* shot by hunters they are being poisoned by ingesting lead shot. If the lead poisoning continues the global population of the species could be halved in 5 years.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 1999, 21(2), 4.

#### Albatross recovery

The number of endangered short-tailed albatrosses *Diomedea albatrus* on Torishima in the Izu Islands, Japan, now exceeds 1000 for the first time since the rediscovery of this breeding colony in 1951. The species was once abundant on islands in the northern Pacific but millions were killed for the feather trade, and by 1949 it was assumed to be extinct.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 1999, 21(2), 7.

## North America

### Marmots need help

Fewer than 100 endangered Vancouver Island marmots *Marmota vancouverensis* survive and up to 20 per cent of the population are being captured for a breeding programme. The marmot is found only in the mountains west of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island and is one of only three mammals endemic to Canada, and is the rarest of the world's marmot species. The animals are threatened partly because clear-cut logging in the valleys has isolated colonies.

Source: <http://www.islandnet.com/marmot>

### North America timber harvest unsustainable

Harvesting of timber in Canada and the USA is unsustainable, according to a report from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis ([www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/FOR/](http://www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/FOR/)). Canada is harvesting at a rate almost twice that of replanting, while the US Forestry Service says that the current timber harvest of 500 million cu m a year could be increased by more than 40 per cent by 2040. The report says this increase will lead to serious environmental damage and violation of protected areas.

Source: *Taiga News*, 1999, No. 27, 2.

### Mussels suffer sponge setback

Introduced zebra mussels *Dreissena polymorpha* in the North American Great Lakes are declining because a native sponge *Eunapius fragilis* is growing on the mussels, preventing them opening their shells to feed or breathe. The sponge has become abundant while the zebra mussel population has fallen by 20–40 per cent in some areas but it is not known if the sponge can control the invaders in the long term.

Source: Early, T.A. & Glonek, T. (1999), *Environmental Science and Technology*, 33, 1957.

### Act for migratory birds

In April 1999 the US Senate unanimously passed the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, providing \$US8 million a year until 2002 for protecting bird habitat in

Latin America and the Caribbean.  
Source: *Audubon*, 1999, 101(4), 20.

### Legislation for great apes

On 10 May US Senator Jim Jeffords introduced legislation to assist in the conservation of great apes and to attempt to halt the illegal trade in bush-meat. The Great Ape Conservation Act, 1999, would provide support and financial resources for the conservation programmes of countries within the range of the great apes. Jefford's bill is modelled on his highly successful African and Asian Elephant Conservation Act, and Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act. It would authorize up to \$US5 million a year to fund conservation projects.

Source: TRAFFIC, 28 June 1999. Web: <http://www.traffic.org>

### Rusty blackbirds declining

There have been steep population declines in populations of rusty blackbirds *Euphagus carolinensis* over the last century in the USA. Analysis of historical records shows that the birds were described as very common in 56 per cent of pre-1920 published accounts but in only 7 per cent of post-1950 accounts. The decline has been c. 90 per cent over the last three decades. Destruction of habitat and acid precipitation could have contributed to the declines.

Source: Greenberg, R. & Droege, S. (1999) *Conservation Biology*, 13(3), 553–559.

### Rules to protect Sargassum

The harvest and possession of *Sargassum* in the South Atlantic Exclusive Economic Zone are to be banned from 1 January 2001. The decision came after the US South Atlantic Fishery Management Council heard presentations on the value of the pelagic *Sargassum* community to c. 100 species of fishes and sea turtles.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, 1999, No. 84, 19.

### Saving salmon

In March 1999 the US federal government listed nine salmon taxa as threatened or endangered. The listing will affect more than 186,400 sq km of rivers and watersheds in Washington and Oregon and could eventually lead to restrictions on new housing, road

building, use of fertilizers and irrigation.

Source: *Audubon*, 1999, 101(3), 14.

### Lynx seen in Oregon

For the first time in 25 years Canada lynx *Lynx canadensis* have been found in the Cascade Range of northern Oregon.

Source: *Audubon*, 1999, 101(3), 16.

### Turtle-egg smugglers in New York

In a 2-week period US Fish and Wildlife Service special agents at New York City's John F. Kennedy International Airport caught 12 people illegally importing 764 eggs of green turtles *Chelonia mydas* and more than 34 kg of turtle meat from Central America. The extent of the smuggling surprised conservationists. Sea-turtle eggs sell as appetizers in some Latin American bars in New York City and in Florida.

Source: *Audubon*, 1999, 101(3), 20.

### Oysters return to the Hudson River

Eastern oysters *Crassostrea virginica* are back in the Hudson River, within 16 km of New York City. The once extensive oyster beds were wiped out by overharvesting by the early 1800s and by the 1950s the Hudson was too polluted for their survival. In the late 1960s, a river clean-up started and the oyster's return indicates the success of the programme.

Source: *Audubon*, 1999, 101(3), 16.

### State acts for loons

The state of New Hampshire is the first in the USA to ban the use of lead fishing gear weighing less than 1 oz (28 g). The move, which will come into effect on 1 January 2000 is to protect loons *Gavia* spp., which ingest lead sinkers and jigs, mistaking them for the pebbles they use to aid digestion. More than half the mortality of adult birds breeding on New England's lakes is from ingesting lead fishing gear.

Source: *Audubon*, 1999, 101(4), 18.

### Sierra bighorns in peril

The Sierra bighorn sheep *Ovis canadensis* population is down to c. 100 individuals. This subspecies occurs only on the crest and eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada mountain range in California, USA. Numbers declined as

a result of competition with and disease spread by domestic sheep, and hunting. Hunting has now stopped and domestic sheep are no longer allowed in the bighorn habitat, but contact between wild and domestic sheep still occurs. The fragmented population is now very susceptible to mountain lion predation. State authorities are considering a captive-breeding programme for the sheep to enable the subspecies to be reintroduced into historical range in the Sequoia National Park where domestic sheep do not threaten bighorn habitat.

Source: *National Parks*, May/June 1999, 12 & 14.

#### Sandboard threat to plants

The sport of sandboarding is threatening endangered plants on the Eureka Dunes in Death Valley National Park, California, USA. Eureka Dunes are home to two federally listed endangered plant species—Eureka Valley dune grass *Swallenia alezandrae* and Eureka Dunes evening primrose *Oenothera avita* ssp *eurekaensis*—which grow nowhere else. A conservation group intends to file a lawsuit against the National Park Service if managers at Death Valley National Park refuse to sign a conservation agreement proposed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service prohibiting sandboarding in the dunes. Source: *National Parks*, May/June 1999, 14–16.

#### Wild California condors continue to soar

California condor *Gymnogyps californianus* numbers continue to rise in the USA as releases in Arizona and California continue. There are now 28 condors in the wild in California, and in Arizona 28 have been released since 1996. Another 97 are in captivity. Future plans call for the Arizona, California and captive populations to be stabilized at 150 birds each. Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, 1999, 102(3), 18.

#### Reintroduction of wolf proceeds despite setback

Another attempt is being made to restore the Mexican grey wolf *Canis lupus* to eastern Arizona (five of the first 11 wolves released in the Apache

National Forest were shot in 1998, one is missing and the rest were recaptured—see *Oryx*, 33[2], 105). One adult pair with two pups has been returned to the wild and there are plans to release a further 11 south of the town of Alpine (one pup has since been found dead). All animals will wear radio collars wrapped in fluorescent orange tape so that biologists can monitor them easily and hunters will not mistake them for coyotes *Canis latrans*. More signs announcing the presence of wolves have been erected and there is a shooting ban in the area. Source: *Audubon*, 1999, 101(3), 16.

#### Bottle-nose dolphins have high toxin levels

Highly toxic levels of pesticides and pollutants, including polychlorinated biphenyls, have been found in the bodies of a group of bottle-nose dolphins *Tursiops truncatus*, which were stranded in Matagorda Bay, Texas, USA, in 1990. The scientists involved in the study are searching for a possible link between dolphin strandings and dolphin declines. Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 1999, 38(4), 236.

#### Funds for turtles

Since the Florida, USA, sea turtle vehicle licence plate became available in February 1998, state residents have purchased over 20,000 plates. The \$US7.50 special fee for each plate goes into the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund, of which up to \$US500,000 annually goes towards funding the State of Florida's Marine Turtle Protection Programme. Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, 1999, No. 85, 30.

#### Turtles killed by long-line fishing

Long-line fishing in Hawaii is estimated to be killing hundreds of turtles every year. Some turtles become entangled and drown, while others swallow baited hooks, which restrict their feeding. The fishermen also use fluorescent lights to lure swordfish to the hooks, and these also attract turtles. The Earthjustice Legal Defence Fund is taking legal action against the National Marine Fisheries Service in Hawaii for failing to put the necessary resources into developing

alternatives to long-line fishing and for not fulfilling an obligation to protect endangered species.

Sources: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 1999, 38(4), 236; *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, 1999, No. 84, 17.

#### Puzzle of grey whale deaths

In early 1999, 50 grey whales *Eschrichtius robustus* were found dead near Mexico's Baja California Peninsula, an all-time high for a migratory season. The cause of death has not been determined but environmental contamination is suspected. Eighteen of the dead whales were found in lagoons where a salt company, in which the Mexican government has a majority stake, operates. Several environmental groups claim that the company's discharges of concentrated brine are responsible for killing dozens of sea turtles and other wildlife.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, 1999, No. 84, 17.

### Central America

#### Oil drilling in biosphere reserve, Guatemala

In December 1998, Basic Petroleum International Ltd. installed a drilling platform in Guatemala's 16,000-sq-km Maya Biosphere Reserve, the country's largest protected tropical forest, without the prior knowledge or consent of the resident community. Source: *Arborvitae*, *The IUCN/WWF Forest Conservation Newsletter*, 1999, No. 11, 3.

### South America

#### Plan to help migrating birds

The dickcissel *Spiza americana* migrates from the Great Plains of North America to the llanos of Venezuela to winter, where it devastates seed crops. A few farmers are killing birds in their nocturnal roosts, sometimes killing a million birds in one night. The entire population of dickcissels numbers about 10 million but the species has declined 35 per cent since 1996. A new alliance between biologists, government officials,

farmers and conservationists from the USA and Venezuela is now trying to stop the slaughter by helping farmers to protect their crops.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation*, 1999, 102(3), 19.

#### **New initiative for Orinoco crocodile**

A new partnership between a commercial cattle ranch, Agropecuaria Puerto Miranda, in Venezuela and The Tortoise Reserve, a private facility for breeding rare turtles, in the USA, is providing additional funds and technical support for the Orinoco crocodile *Crocodylus intermedius* breeding programme in Venezuela. The farm provides juvenile crocodiles for reintroduction and under the new partnership is raising giant river turtles *Podocnemis expansa* for reintroduction in the Orinoco, and the red-footed tortoise *Geochelone carbonaria*. The latter species is not endangered but has high value in the US pet market where supplies from sustainable, legal sources are limited. The farm has acquired breeding stock from existing captive animals. The Tortoise Reserve is importing and marketing the tortoises and the proceeds are being used to support Puerto Miranda's captive-breeding conservation programmes.

Source: *Crocodile Specialist Group Newsletter*, 1999, 18(1), 10–11.

#### **Amazonian deforestation increases**

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon increased by 27 per cent in 1998, with 16,800 sq km being cleared. Since 1972, 532,068 sq km, 13.3 per cent of the entire Amazon region, has been lost. These figures could be underestimates because satellite monitoring identifies only deforested areas of over 6 ha. It also misses 10,000–15,000 sq km a year that are severely damaged by logging crews and fire damage to standing forest.

Source: *Arborvitae*, *The IUCN/WWF Forest Conservation Newsletter*, 1999, No. 11, 2.

#### **Port threat to terns in Chile**

Mejillones Bay in Chile, an outstanding area for seabirds, is under threat from a government plan to build a large port. Birds that breed in the area include Peruvian terns *Sterna lorata*, a species that breeds only in Peru and northern Chile.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 21(2), 4.

#### **Giant pulp mill threatens Chilean forest**

A giant pulp mill planned by Boise Cascade Corporation and Maderas Condor SA in Ilque Bay, Chile, threatens over 2 million ha of forests. Already less than 40 per cent of Chile's temperate rain forest remain. The forests near the planned mill are home to pudu *Pudu pudu* and 40 other threatened mammals.

Source: *Arborvitae*, *The IUCN/WWF Forest Conservation Newsletter*, 1999, No. 11, 3.

### **Australia/New Zealand/Antarctica**

#### **Wildlife threatened by organophosphate baits**

The use of organophosphates and other pesticides is now permitted on baits to poison cockatoo species regarded as agricultural pests in Victoria, Australia. There are fears that unscrupulous landowners may take advantage of relaxed controls to target protected wildlife. Many birds of prey will also be at risk because they are attracted to prey weakened by poison.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 1999, 21(2), 3.

#### **Residents' demands threaten World Heritage Site**

A plan to extend mains electricity north of the Daintree River in the Daintree World Heritage Site, Queensland, Australia, is causing concern to conservationists. If mains power were introduced, to service residential blocks carved out of the rain forest, a spiral of ecological degradation would follow as more residents were attracted to the area. Only one solution appears possible—a major buyback fund to enable the remaining land of conservation value to be bought for inclusion in the national park.

Source: <http://www.austrop.org.au>

#### **Dugongs to get more protection**

The Australian government has proposed a 6000-km increase in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park so that the entire system is protected. A number of the new protected areas include seagrass beds that are of vital importance to dugongs *Dugong dugon*.

Once the Queensland Government has approved the proposals, the new areas will be included in the park under the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act, 1975.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 1999, 38(4), 235–236.

#### **Kakapo breed after translocation**

Kakapo *Strigops habroptilus* temporarily transferred from Codfish Island to Pearl Island in New Zealand in 1999 in order to allow rat eradication to take place on Codfish Island have nested. Five females produced 7 nests and 14 eggs. Along with three eggs that were found on Little Barrier Island, the eggs were incubated artificially: six of the eight hatchlings that emerged survived. There are now 62 of these endangered ground-nesting parrots, including the six 1999 juveniles. All of the wild birds except one are on five offshore islands to which they have been relocated since 1975 to protect them from introduced predators.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 1999, 21(2), 3; Don Merton, National Kakapo Team, July 1999.

#### **Greening of the furniture trade**

New Zealand's Forest & Bird Protection Society has asked the country's furniture industry to join Green Furniture 2000 and stop using native timber. Most of the country's forest industry has switched to plantation forestry and most native timber on the market now comes from the Timberland logging company's operations in the rain forest on the West Coast. Inspecting logging that is claimed to be sustainable, the Society found that it was wrecking forest structure, bulldozing debris into watercourses and exposing the forest to weed invasion.

Source: <http://www.forest-bird.org.nz>

#### **Addition to New Zealand park**

The addition of Waitutu forest to the Fiordland National Park in South Island, New Zealand, has put 460 sq km of virgin forest under permanent protection following 20 years of debate and the constant threat of logging. The forest, now known as the Waitutu Conservation Area, lies between the 12,100-sq-km national park and the 2171-ha block of



the Waitutu Incorporation, a Maori-owned forest managed on national park lines. Waitutu contains the largest surviving population of the Vulnerable South Island yellowhead *Mohoua ochrocephala*. The Near Threatened New Zealand falcon *Falco novaeseelandiae* also occurs there. The beech and podocarp forest is home to the largest known population of the Vulnerable South Island kaka *Nestor meridionalis*.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, 1999, No. 291, 4.

#### **New population of shore plover**

A previously unknown population of the endangered shore plover *Thinornis novaeseelandiae* has been found on a pest-free reef in the Chatham Islands. Fifteen males, five females and a fledgling were located after commercial fishermen reported their possible presence.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, 1999, No. 292, 4.

#### **New New Zealand butterflies**

Research at the Otago Museum has extended the list of New Zealand butterflies, including 25 distinct species of copper butterflies. Previously, New Zealand was considered to be butterfly poor, with only 13 species of about 26 recorded species not found elsewhere.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, 1999, No. 291, 5.

#### **Introduced possums killing native trees**

Introduced possums *Trichosurus vulpecula* are to blame for the die-back and premature death of New Zealand's mountain cedars, or pahautea *Libocedrus bidwillii*. Possums browse cedar in late spring–early summer when the leaf buds open and mature, and trees with more than 75 per cent of foliage damaged do not recover.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, 1999, No. 291, 6.

#### **Brighter prospects for oystercatchers**

A survey of the Chatham Islands, New Zealand, found 141 adult Chatham Island oystercatchers *Haematopus chathamensis*; previous counts in 1996–98 gave an estimated 65–120 adults. The higher count could

be a result of covering all four islands more efficiently with a larger team, but there is good evidence for a real increase, including an increase in the number of breeding pairs on the north coast of the main island, where the Department of Conservation has been protecting nests and controlling predators.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, 1999, No. 292, 4.

#### **Lizards increasing after rat eradication**

Several species of lizards are increasing in numbers following the eradication of Pacific rats *Rattus exulans* from the Lady Alice and Coppermine Islands, in the Hen and Chicken Islands, off Northland, New Zealand. Species found on the islands include: Duvaucel's gecko *Hoplodactylus duvaucelii*, moko skink *Oligosoma moco*, shore skink *O. smithi*, Suter's, or egg-laying, skink *O. suteri*, ornate skink *Cyclodina ornata* and the copper skink *C. aenea*. A number of species on the islands are no longer found on the mainland. Several species of lizards have been reintroduced to the islands, including Pacific gecko *Hoplodactylus pacificus*, Mokohinau, or marbled, skink *Cyclodina oliveri* and McGregor's skink *C. macgregori*. These have been taken from some of the smaller islands in the group that remained rat-free.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, 1999, No. 292, 9.

#### **New Zealand's rare trees**

A New Zealand tree daisy *Olearia gardneri* has become the country's third rarest tree species after recent research found it to be distinct from *O. hectorii*, with which it was formerly confused. Fewer than 60 individuals are known in the wild and only 9 are in reserves. New Zealand's rarest tree is *Pennantia baylisiana* in the Three Kings Islands, of which there is a single female, and the second rarest is *Metrosideros bartlettii*, which numbers 30 individuals.

Source: *Forest & Bird*, 1999, No. 292, 12.

#### **Progress on marine reserves in New Zealand**

The Pohatu Marine Reserve at Banks Peninsula has been approved by New Zealand's Minister of Conservation and Minister of Fisheries. This is the first marine reserve on the eastern shore of South Island and the 14th in the country. It will protect 210 ha of coastal waters including the shores of a significant colony of declining white-flippered penguins *Eudyptula minor albosignata*. Another marine reserve—the Paranihihi Marine Reserve, north of New Plymouth, North Island—has been approved by the Minister of Conservation, but at 1812 ha is only half the size of the original proposal. It is noted for its sponges and soft corals.

Sources: *Forest & Bird*, 1999, No. 291, 11; *Forest & Bird (Conservation News)*, 1999, No. 114, 3.

#### **'New' plants for Falklands**

The native flora of the Falkland Islands has been extended to 169 species by the discovery in a herbarium of a sedge that was collected in West Falkland and misidentified as *Carex acaulis*. It has now been correctly identified as *Carex barrosii*. A survey of the literature revealed that Antarctic cudweed *Gamochaeta antarctica* is a valid species endemic to the Falkland Islands, bringing the total number of the endemics to 14.

Source: *The Warrah*, 1999, No. 15, 5.

#### **New marine park for Antarctica**

A new marine park has been proposed for Australia's Antarctic waters in the Macquarie Island region. It is a breeding ground for subantarctic fur seal *Arctocephalus tropicalis* and elephant seal *Mirounga leonina*, home to threatened species of penguins and the Patagonian toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides*. The 160,000-sq km park will include a protected zone in which fishing and mining will be banned.

Source: Radio Australia, Melbourne, 20 June 1999.