

International

Regional application of IUCN guidelines

The criteria used for categorising species on the IUCN Red List have inspired several national and regional authorities to develop similar systems. Guidelines for improving the consistency and validity of sub-global assessments by using the IUCN global criteria without alteration have now been developed. The essence of these guidelines is that the extinction risk faced by regional populations can be assessed using the global criteria if the resulting categories are modified to take account of distribution and movement of populations. If a regional population is completely isolated then the global category translates directly to the regional category. However, if the population range extends across geopolitical borders the risk categories should be modified to acknowledge the fact that the regional population could be affected by nearby populations. This paper is part of a work in progress and the authors are open to comments on the issue or the approach taken by the IUCN.

Source: Gärdenfors, U. *et al.* (2001) *Conservation Biology*, **15**, 1206–1212.

Review of whale meat controls

In July 2001, TRAFFIC released three reports based on its continuing efforts to review whale meat controls in Japan, South Korea and Norway. Significant progress has been made by Japan and Norway in implementing domestic management systems and especially in the establishment of DNA registers of whales legally caught in their waters. Whilst there are still question marks over the systems in these countries, TRAFFIC noted with satisfaction that recent revisions to the whaling regulations now require mandatory reporting of the bycatch of large whales in trap net fisheries, provision of DNA samples for analysis and reporting of the DNA results to the government. The information from these studies will be helpful at both CITES and the International Whaling Commission.

Source: TRAFFIC *Dispatches* (2001), **17**, 1 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/publications>).

Illegal fishing undermines

Patagonian Toothfish conservation

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, primarily in the Southern Ocean, continues to threaten the Patagonian Toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides* according to a recent report by TRAFFIC International. IUU catches were estimated to account for half of the total trade in 2000, despite the implementation of conservation and management measures since 1997 by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. These initiatives, including the use of a catch documentation scheme and automated satellite-linked vessel monitoring, may have helped to reduce IUU fishing levels between 1998 and 1999. By 2000, however, IUU catch had risen once more to 1998 levels. Since intensive fishing began in the early 1990s high demand in restaurants in Japan, the USA, Canada and the EU, combined with obstacles associated with surveillance of remote fishing grounds, has fuelled IUU fishing. The report identifies 11 participants involved in IUU fishing since 1998 (Argentina, Belize, Chile, Denmark, Panama, Sao Tome and Principe, the Seychelles, Spain, UK, Uruguay and Vanuatu). Some of these countries have fished directly for Patagonian Toothfish, whilst others have acted as Flag of Convenience States, allowing IUU fishing vessels from other nations to operate under their flags, without accepting responsibility for their activities.

Source: Lack, M. & Sant, G. (2001) *TRAFFIC Bulletin*, **19**(1), in press (available at <http://www.traffic.org/toothfish>).

Concerns over forest certification schemes

A recent report *Behind the Logo* expresses concerns over the conservation benefits of a number of forest certification schemes that have been introduced around the world. The report undertook an in-depth comparison of four certifi-

cation schemes: the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the Pan European Forest Certification (PEFC) scheme, the Canadian Standard's Association (CSA) Forest Management Standard and the US's Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). Although in need of improvement, the FSC scheme is currently the only independent and credible certification scheme in the market. The PEFC scheme raises the most concerns, and both CSA and SFI score poorly against a range of criteria. All three of FSC's rival schemes are industry-led and make little meaningful engagement with environmental or social groups.

Source: *Taiga News* (2001), **36**, 1 & 11 (also at <http://www.taigarescue.org/taiganews>).

Bleaching may help corals to survive

A recent study by the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society suggests that the phenomenon of coral bleaching may actually allow some corals to adapt to global warming and other environmental change. Corals may use this high risk strategy to rid themselves of sub-optimal algae and thus become hosts to more suitable algal types that may increase their chances of survival in times of stress. Whilst bleaching has killed a high percentage of corals in some areas, the findings indicate that bleaching can sometimes help corals respond quickly to environmental change.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), **42**(8), 673.

Europe

Mediterranean countries adopt new action plan for marine turtles

The Mediterranean Sea is home to five of the seven species of marine turtles as well as two unique breeding populations of loggerhead and green turtles. It has a history of traditional exploitation of turtles as well as complex management issues. Mediterranean countries have

now adopted a new action plan for the conservation of sea turtles that has three main objectives: protection, conservation and, where possible, enhancement of populations; protection, conservation and management of turtle habitats; improvement of current scientific knowledge. The revised action plan also emphasises the importance of addressing interactions of turtles with Mediterranean fisheries.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2001), 93, 42–43 (also at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn>).

UK conservation programme for marine turtles

In March 2001 the UK's Environment Minister launched a new conservation programme for marine turtles in UK waters and those of its Overseas Territories. The Marine Turtle Conservation Programme (MTCP) is an initiative of the UK's Marine Conservation Society. Outputs during 2001 will include a revised Turtle Code, a dedicated turtle sightings scheme and a revised turtle sightings and strandings database. There will also be an ongoing campaign to prevent marine littering, and various educational projects involving schools in the UK.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2001), 93, 40 (also at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn>).

Pine marten could make a comeback in England

An assessment of 11 potential sites in England has concluded that conditions may now favour reintroductions of the pine marten *Martes martes*. Persecution associated with gamekeeping saw pine marten numbers fall and their distribution contract to parts of north-west Scotland, north Wales and northern England. But the study suggests this carnivore could make a successful return to areas throughout England, including Bodmin Moor, the Forest of Dean and Breckland. Having selected areas with sufficient woodland cover, these potential release sites were then compared with areas of current pine marten distribution to assess whether reintroductions were likely to succeed. Factors contributing to pine marten mortality such as fox predation, road traffic and trapping were used to indicate whether new populations could become established. The abundance of prey and availability

of carrion were used to assess the likelihood of population expansion. Despite a higher risk of mortality at potential release sites, these locations have a greater availability of food than areas of current pine marten distribution. This suggests that population expansion could occur should stochastic extinction be avoided. Although selected sites could support relatively high pine marten densities, areas of England where populations have held on may not favour a recovery of numbers. Here, predator control and poor habitat remain constraints.

Source: Bright, P.W. & Smithson, T.J. (2001) *Biodiversity & Conservation*, 10(8), 1247–1265.

Rare Scottish reefs are threatened

Temperate reefs in Scotland are being threatened by human activities such as dredging and the use of mobile bottom fishing gear. The reefs are formed by the calcareous tubular secretions of the marine fan worm *Serpula vermicularis* in a process similar to coral formation. These reefs occur in only three locations in the British Isles: Killary Harbour and Ardbear Lough in Ireland and Loch Creran in Scotland. Scotland's national conservation body, Scottish Natural Heritage, have proposed Loch Creran as a Special Area of Conservation. The reefs in this loch provide an oasis for a rich epibenthic marine fauna.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), 42(8), 674.

Anti-wolf drive by Norwegian forest-owners

Two of Norway's largest forest owner associations have initiated a campaign to eradicate the wolf in Norway. Members and candidates for the Parliament were invited to a meeting in August at which an 'expert panel' gave speeches and answered questions about wolf issues. This panel consisted of people from the self-declared 'anti-wolf' congregation. Pro-carnivore and environmental organisations, including WWF, were specifically excluded. The main argument for removal is that wolves feed on moose and so threaten Norwegian moose populations and reduce income available from hunting. Population figures for moose and wolves do not seem to support this view. There are 100,000–140,000 moose in Norway and hunters take around 40,000

annually, fewer than recommended to combat the threat to forest productivity by overgrazing. In contrast, there are 40–45 wolves in Norway, including those that live on the border with Sweden. Wood products from the organisations involved are eco-labelled under the Pan-European Forest Certification (PEFC) scheme, even though the anti-wolf campaign is a direct violation of the policy that provides the basis for the certification.

Source: WWF web site: <http://panda.org/news/press/news.cfm?id=2449>

Northern Eurasia

Ministry takes action over illegal logging in the Russian Far East

The Ministry of Natural Resources in Russia, which recently absorbed the Forestry Service, has declared war on illegal logging in the Far East of the country. Whilst official reports suggest illegal logging accounts for only 0.04% of timber procurement, WWF claims the figure is 40–50%. An estimated 1.5 million m³ of timber a year is cut illegally in the Primorye Territory alone. Since the early 1990s only one person has been convicted of illegal logging and sent to prison.

Source: *Taiga News* (2001), 36, 3 (also at <http://www.taigarescue.org/taiganews>).

Ecological disaster in Turkey

On 6 March 2001, staff at the Kazanli Soda-Chrome Factory in southern Turkey bulldozed the retaining wall of an effluent collecting basin releasing its contents into the sea. The sea turned red, wiping out local marine life, including local fish stocks. The beaches at Kazanli host one of only three remaining nesting sites in Turkey of the Critically Endangered green turtle. The chemicals discharged into the sea are thought to have included highly toxic chromium and chromates.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2001), 93, 48 (also at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn>).

Compromise on Caspian Sea caviar

On 21 June 2001, three caviar-producing states agreed to halt sturgeon fishing in the Caspian Sea for the remainder of the year and committed themselves to

addressing the concern over plummeting stocks. Four Caspian Sea range states, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, have already reduced their export quotas on Caspian species by 50% since 1998, but there are still problems concerning domestic consumption, poaching and illegal trade. Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have agreed to conduct a comprehensive survey of sturgeon stocks, set joint catch and export quotas and assess illegal trade and enforcement needs. This has been applauded by TRAFFIC and the CITES Standing Committee. Turkmenistan faces immediate suspension of the international trade if it does not commit itself to these measures.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2001), 17, 7 & 9 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/publications>).

Middle East and North Africa

A conservation success in Yemen

A recent study shows that for the first time since surveys began in 1978, no new rhino horns were made into dagger (*jambiya*) handles in the Sana'a souk in Yemen. This is a major success as Yemen was until recently the major end-market for African rhino horn. Prices have not risen, despite the lack of horn, because Yemenis are not prepared to pay more for a *jambiya* with new rhino horn. In addition, a *jambiya* with an old rhino horn is considered more prestigious. At the cheaper end of the market, more *jambiya* with horn from the Indian domestic water buffalo are being offered for sale.

Source: Vigne, L. & Martin, E.B. (2001) *Pachyderm*, 30, 87–95 (also at <http://iucn.org/themes/ssc/sgs/afesg/pachy>).

Sub-Saharan Africa

Trends in the ivory trade in Africa

A major survey of 22 cities in 15 African countries found over 100,000 elephant ivory items for sale in the late 1990s. In all countries, except Egypt, Gabon and Sudan, this domestic trade is legal. The

main buyers are foreign tourists, Chinese and Korean workers and businessmen, French military and their families, UN officials and national diplomats. Except for Zimbabwe, the export of all these ivory commodities is illegal. There is a significant illicit movement of raw ivory within Africa, especially from Central to West Africa. Compared to 1988 the prices for ivory items have decreased, partly due to a decline in demand. Since the 1990 CITES ban, only Lagos in Nigeria has shown an increase in retail sales.

Source: Stiles, D. & Martin, E.B. (2001) *Pachyderm*, 30, 24–36 (also at <http://iucn.org/themes/ssc/sgs/afesg/pachy>).

Coelacanth found off the Kenyan coast

A coelacanth was captured early in 2001 in the nets of a commercial trawler operating off the coastal resort of Malindi, but news of its existence only surfaced in October 2001. The fish, 1.7 m long and weighing 77 kg, was delivered to the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi, after lying for months in the Mombasa-based fishery company's cold storage depot. This is the first time that a coelacanth has been caught off the Kenyan coast. Until 1938, coelacanths were known only from ancient fossils, some dating back 360 million years. Their sudden disappearance from the fossil record about 80 million years ago suggested that coelacanths had been extinct since the time of the dinosaurs. The first living coelacanth was discovered off the east coast of South Africa near East London in 1938. Described as 'living fossils', coelacanths have changed very little over the past 360 million years. They differ markedly from all other living fishes in having fleshy appendages, or lobes, at the bases of their paired fins. The Kenyan discovery may indicate that coelacanths are still more widely distributed today than has previously been assumed.

Source: <http://www.reliefweb.int/IRIN/cea/countrystories/kenya/20011009.phtml>

Butterfly populations in forest fragments in Kenya

A recent survey looked at the species richness, diversity and composition of two butterfly communities in the Muhaka and Mrima coastal forest

remnants in Kenya. Sixty-three species were recorded from each remnant, and despite their small sizes these remnants were able to maintain viable populations of true forest butterflies. The number of species was less than half that of the larger forest reserve of Arabuko-Sokoke located in the same area. Some of the species are unique to the Muhaka forest, emphasising the importance of small remnants in the preservation of forest biodiversity. If habitat corridors could be created between these reserves and other larger areas, gene flow would help reduce both the isolation of forest butterfly populations and the potential for local extinction.

Source: Rogo, L. & Odulaja, A. (2001) *African Journal of Ecology*, 39(3), 266–275.

Breakdown of elephant social behaviour

African elephants *Loxodonta africana* traditionally have a matriarchal structure consisting of herds of related females. However within the Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda, this social structure is breaking down. Analysis of the mitochondrial genome showed that herds contain unrelated females, possibly as a result of the selective poaching of matriarchs. This is resulting in the coalescence of family units into large herds, which increases habitat degradation and causes further problems for the management of the national park.

Source: Nyakaana, S., *et al.* (2001) *Animal Conservation*, 4(3), 231–237.

Leopard hunting to resume in Zimbabwe

African Eye News Service reports that Zimbabwe has approved 38 'trial' leopard hunts as part of a new wildlife management plan that has infuriated local conservationists. Zimbabwe's Environmental Affairs Ministry official Margaret Chinamora argues that hunting safaris are an important source of foreign exchange and generated almost US\$ 18 million two years ago. Zimbabwe's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which succeeded in getting all leopard hunting permits cancelled in 2000, insists however that the new wildlife management policy is irresponsible because a population count has not yet been conducted.

Source: <http://wildnetafrica.com/wildlifenews/2001/09/1789.html>

Introduced giraffes affect *Acacia* distribution in South Africa

A recent study has documented the impact of introduced giraffes on *Acacia* species in the Ithala Game Reserve in South Africa. Several *Acacia* species occurring in high-density giraffe areas had high levels of mortality. Populations of *Acacia davyi* were extinct in areas accessible to giraffe. Healthy populations of sensitive species occurred in areas within, or adjacent to, the reserve in areas with low or no giraffe browsing. Areas too steep for giraffe formed spatial refuges for these trees. The impact of giraffe browsing is altering species composition and distribution within this savannah landscape.

Source: Bond, W.J. & Loffell, D. (2001) *African Journal of Ecology*, **39**(3), 286–294.

South African penguins are successfully rehabilitated

Recent research has shown that the 16,300 penguins cleaned and released after the oil spill in Table Bay, South Africa, in 2000 have made a successful transition back into the wild. However, there is still a question as to whether the animals will breed successfully. Research has shown that only 7% of cleaned, rehabilitated African penguins from Dassen Island bred by the end of May 2001, compared to 33% of the evacuated and unoled birds. The disruption of pair bonds also had an effect on breeding success. Surprisingly, 2001 was a good year for penguin breeding because of an abundance of pilchards and anchovies. The total estimated cost to date of the entire clean-up operation was R55 million, with R48 million paid out by insurance.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), **42**(8), 674.

Three new species of mouse lemur in Madagascar

Scientists working in the dry forests of Madagascar have discovered three new species of mouse lemur: *Microcebus berthae*, *M. sambiranensis* and *M. tavaratra*. One of these, *M. berthae*, weighs only 30 g and now ranks as the world's smallest primate. Less than 10 years ago, only two species of mouse lemur were recognised. A third species, *M. myoxinus*, was re-confirmed as a distinct species in 1993, whilst a fourth, *M. ravelobensis*, was described much more recently. Mouse lemurs are believed to be the most

numerous of all Madagascar's 40 or so species of lemur, but face the same pressures of a rapidly increasing human population that results in an annual loss of 1–2% of the island's remaining forests. Source: *Svara* (2001), **24**(1), 12–13.

South and South-east Asia

Carcasses of 3,500 turtles on beach in India

The carcasses of over 3,500 olive ridley turtles have been found on Gahirmatha beach in Kendrapara district in Orissa, eastern India. The animals are believed to have been killed by fishing trawlers working in an area that has been designated a marine sanctuary. Nearly 600,000 turtles had arrived on the beach, which is the world's biggest rookery for this species. Although distressing, the figure for carcasses was considerably lower than the previous year when more than 10,000 were found dead.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2001), **93**, 48 (also at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn>).

Chestnut-headed hill partridge found in Thailand

In December 2000 an expedition confirmed the presence of chestnut-headed hill partridge *Arborophila cambodiana diversa* in the Kao Soi Dao Wildlife Sanctuary in south-eastern Thailand. This species is listed as Endangered in the latest Partridge, Quail and Francolin Action Plan. A systematic survey of the area was not possible, but the expanse of available habitat suggested that a few hundred individuals could possibly occur within the sanctuary.

Source: *Species* (2001), **35**, 7 (also at <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/species/spec-int.htm>).

Whale sharks in need of protection

In early 2001 a massive trade in whale sharks *Rhinocodon typus* was uncovered in Gujarat, west India, raising concerns that this species could be threatened with extinction unless better management measures are introduced. Whale sharks were once thought to be commercially unimportant, but have become victims of a lucrative, targeted fishery. Sharks are harvested for their meat, fins,

liver, skin and cartilage, and one animal can be worth as much as \$3,200. More information is needed about India's whale shark stocks as well as possible alternative sources of income for local fishermen. It is also suggested that the whale shark be listed on India's Wildlife (Protection) Act and Appendix II of CITES. The former was implemented when, in May 2001, the species was listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act making fishing and trade, in all its forms, illegal.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2001), **17**, 10 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/publications>).

First observation of Siamese crocodile in Lao PDR in 30 years

The Siamese crocodile *Crocodylus siamensis*, with a range that includes Lao, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, is one of the least known species of crocodiles. It is on CITES Appendix I and is categorized as Critically Endangered on the 2000 IUCN Red List. On the 30 November 1998 a juvenile was identified at a range of 2 m in a small pond in Atsaphone district that, along with surrounding forest, is considered sacred by the local people. Excrement and tracks indicated the existence of other, larger individuals. The last direct observations of the species in the region were in the 1950s and 1960s along the Lao-Cambodia border.

Source: Mateus, O. (2001) *Amphibia-Reptilia*, **22**(2), 253–256.

CITES legislation in Viet Nam

Viet Nam has a long history of trade in wild species. At the international level Viet Nam is a source area for reptiles and small to medium-sized mammals. Viet Nam acceded to CITES in 1994 and since then has striven to deal with the issue of wildlife trade. In early April 2001, draft CITES legislation was completed and then reviewed by the Asia-Pacific Centre for Environmental Law, IUCN, WWF and TRAFFIC. It is expected that a revised draft will be submitted to the Prime Minister for ratification in September 2001. This legislation will provide for better implementation of CITES regulations.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2001), **17**, 3 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/publications>).

Nests of estuarine terrapins found in Cambodia

In January 2001 Cambodian agriculture and environment officials and scientists from the Wildlife Conservation Society found nests of the estuarine terrapin *Batagur baska* along the Sre Ambel River in Koh Kong Province. The last recorded sighting of this species in Cambodia was in 1890. The species historically ranged from India to Viet Nam; today there are fewer than 30 in India, and scattered populations in Malaysia. The biggest threat to the species comes from people collecting the terrapins and their eggs as food. The terrapins have gained the interest of the Cambodian royal family, with King Norodom Sihanouk pledging his support for action to conserve the species.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation* (2001), October, 10.

Asia-Pacific forum on karst ecosystems

In May 2001 the Asia Pacific Forum on Karst Ecosystems and World Heritage was held in Gunung Mulu National Park in Sarawak. South-east Asia has some of the world's most extensive karst formations. These formations have yet to be properly recognised for their importance for biodiversity. At the meeting, existing karst sites were reviewed and their biodiversity values discussed. Only a few karst areas have been designated as World Heritage Sites and these were for reasons other than their biodiversity value. A list of about 50 karst candidate areas for World Heritage Site status was drawn up.

Source: *Malaysian Naturalist* (2001), 55(1), 38–39.

East Asia

New reserve for large cats

China is to set up a new nature reserve on its border with Russia to conserve Siberian tigers and Far Eastern leopards. An estimated 330–370 Siberian tigers exist in the wild, but only a single population of 25–40 Far Eastern, or Amur, leopards remains. Wildlife experts from China and Russia and several Chinese government agencies have joined forces with US biologists from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). China's

Jilin Forestry Department has agreed to establish the Jilin Hunchun nature reserve along the border with Russia's Primorski Krai, and a second reserve is under consideration. The creation of the Jilin Hunchun reserve should increase the amount of suitable habitat for the two species. Both are Critically Endangered, and the reserve's creation has rekindled hopes for their survival.

Source: <http://wcs.org/3422?newsarticle=51264>

Swallowtail butterfly habitat protected

In Taiwan, the Council of Agriculture has designated the area around Kuanwu in Miaoli County as a Major Wildlife Habitat under the Wildlife Conservation Law. This will help protect the threatened and endemic broad-tailed swallowtail butterfly *Aeghania maraho*. This new protected area is situated at an elevation of 1,900–2,000 m and contains a large area of *Sassafaras randaiense* forest, which is the sole food source for the butterfly's caterpillars.

Source: *International Conservation Newsletter* (2001), 9(2), 6.

North America

Polar bear decline prompts importation ban

A severe decline in Canada's M'Clintock Channel polar bear population has caused the Interior Department's US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to ban the importation of polar bears taken after 31 May 2000, the close of the 1999–2000 hunting season. Polar bears are protected under the US Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), which requires the Service to regulate the issue of import permits for polar bear trophies. When the Canadian Wildlife Service revised its estimate of the M'Clintock Channel polar bear population from 700 to 300 animals, the USFWS was required by law to stop issuing import permits. The ban will remain in effect until the bears are restored to a level where they can sustain some limited harvest. Canada decreased the sport-hunting quota for the M'Clintock Channel polar bear population from 32 to 12 animals for the 2000–2001 harvest season and declared a hunting moratorium for

2001–2002. The USFWS can relax the import permit ban when scientific and management data indicate that the M'Clintock polar bears have recovered. In making its determination, the Service must consider the scientific integrity of sport-hunting quotas and whether the monitoring and enforcement programme meets the purposes of the 1973 International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears.

Source: <http://news.fws.gov/newsreleases/display.cfm?NewsID=DD59919C-2226-4077-A31FC58FAC8E7DDE>

Reptiles increasingly popular as pets in the US

A study commissioned by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) presents the analysis of live reptile import and export data for 1989–1997. More than 18.3 million live reptiles of 600 taxa were imported into the US during 1989–1997, including more than 5.7 million tortoises and turtles. About 9 million reptiles were kept as pets in the US in 2000, a 10% increase since 1998. In 1997 most live reptiles were imported through the ports of Miami and Los Angeles. The HSUS estimates the retail value of trade in live amphibians and reptiles to be about \$2 million annually. In addition to the imports, more than 57.8 million reptiles were exported from the US between 1989–1997. Most of these were destined for Asia.

Source: Telecky, T.M. (2001) *Turtle & Tortoise Newsletter*, 4, 8–13 (also at <http://www.chelonian.org/ttn>).

US to halt shark finning

Regulations have been proposed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to halt shark finning in US waters. Existing regulations have prohibited finning in federal waters of the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Sea. The new regulations would define the boundaries as being from 3 miles offshore to beyond 200 miles. The ban would apply to all US citizens and vessels. The regulations would prohibit people under US jurisdiction from engaging in shark finning in international or federal waters. Such people would also be banned from possessing fins harvested in international or federal waters without the corresponding carcasses or landing fins without carcasses. Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), 42(9), 705–706.

Proposal to list US smalltooth sawfish as Endangered

The US population of smalltooth sawfish *Pristis pectinata* is currently restricted to south Florida and is in danger of extinction. This is a widely distributed species that is listed as globally Endangered. It has been wholly or partly extirpated from large areas of its former range in the North Atlantic and South-west Atlantic coast by fishing and habitat modification. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service has proposed that the US population be listed as Endangered.

Source: *Shark News* (2001), 13, 14 (also at <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/Organizations/ssg/ssgdefault.html>).

Spiny dogfish fishery halted

The commercial fishery for spiny dogfish *Squalus acanthias* of the north-east coast of the US was closed in June 2001 as the first half of an annual quota was reached. The spiny dogfish fishery began about a decade ago, peaking at over 60 million pounds in 1996. Most of the dogfish are exported to Europe. There have been delays in implementing a fishery management plan for the species, and the unregulated take of mature females has taken its toll, with the number of pups currently at an all-time low. It has already been estimated that rebuilding of the population could take more than 20 years, but this has not stopped various States pressing for increased quotas.

Source: *Shark News* (2001), 13, 7 (also at <http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/Organizations/ssg/ssgdefault.html>).

Growing dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico

A dead zone the size of Belgium exists in the Gulf of Mexico near to the delta of the Mississippi River. The area of water extends for 20,495 km² and has too little oxygen to support sea life. The zone has formed where the nutrient-rich waters of the Mississippi enter the Gulf of Mexico, causing phytoplankton to bloom. The decomposition of these phytoplankton consumes oxygen, creating an anoxic area. In some areas of the dead zone the anoxic water rises 12–15 m above the bottom. The zone begins near the shore and stretches for up to 80 km out to sea. Changes in the size of the dead zone are evidence that it is fueled

by fertiliser and sewage runoff carried by the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), 42(9), 707.

Sea otter population remains roughly stable

A census of Californian sea otters in spring 2001 showed a slight decrease in numbers compared to the previous year. Whilst the figure of 2,161 adults was 6.7% lower than in 2000, the number of pups had increased by 12.9% to 298. The population appears to have been stable for the past few years but the otters have still not recovered to the numbers seen in the mid-1990s. Entanglement or entrapment in coastal fishing gear, starvation, disease and contaminants may have contributed to this recent decline.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), 42(8), 676.

New lighting system to assist turtle hatchlings

The Florida Department of Transportation is installing a new lighting system in an attempt to help turtle hatchlings reach the sea. A stretch of road at Boca Raton will be lit by saucer-sized dome lights that are embedded in the road. These lights will be invisible to hatchlings looking for the ocean, and vegetation will prevent any light reaching the beach. The results of the \$500,000 experiment will be carefully monitored over two nesting seasons.

Source: *Marine Turtle Newsletter* (2001), 93, 45 (also at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtn>).

Largest marine reserve will be in Florida

As of 1 July 2001 the Tortugas Ecological Reserve in Florida will be the largest permanent marine reserve in the US. The reserve is located more than 110 km west of Key West, Florida and encompasses more than 500 km² of deepwater corals and critical fish spawning sites. The Tortugas reserve has two areas, Tortugas North and Tortugas South. The north areas remains open for diving and has mooring buoys to protect the reefs from anchor damage. The south area is open only to vessels in transit and to those holding a sanctuary permit. In a related move the Environmental Protection Agency is proposing to

designate waters of the State of Florida within the boundaries of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary as a no discharge zone.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), 42(9), 707–708.

Central America and Caribbean

First dialogue meeting on Caribbean hawksbills

The first dialogue meeting on Caribbean hawksbill turtles was held in May 2001 in Mexico City and was attended by 34 range states and territories. This was the result of a proposal agreed at the 11th Conference of the Parties (COP) to CITES in Nairobi in 2000. Common topics of concern included standardization of monitoring protocols, conservation impacts of management schemes, and policies needed to establish a regional strategy and management plan in the wider Caribbean. A draft resolution from the meeting will be proposed for adoption at the next CITES COP in November 2002. The dialogue meeting was considered a success and another will be held in one of the UK Territories in the region in April or May 2002.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2001), 17, 9 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/publications>).

Rainforest fragment size affects primate populations

A recent study on brown capuchin, brown howler monkey and woolly spider monkey populations in the Atlantic rainforest of south-east Brazil showed that small fragments of Atlantic rainforest sheltered higher primate densities than did large fragments. However, these small fragments also contained fewer species than larger fragments. Researchers believe that primate populations in small fragments benefit from the absence of major predators and the lack of competition among the three species, and that some species are able to readily adapt to changing environmental conditions. Nevertheless, small fragments are easily accessed by hunters, which might mean future extinction.

Source: González-Solís, J. *et al.* (2001) *Biodiversity & Conservation*, 10(8), 1267–1282.

South America

New species of frog from the Atlantic Forest of Brazil

A new species of frog *Brachycephalus vertebralis* has been described from the Atlantic Forest of Brazil. The family Brachycephalidae is endemic to the Atlantic Forest extending from the State of Espirito Santo to the State of Parana in south-eastern Brazil. The new species was discovered at Pedra Branca, an area where the altitude ranges from 200 to 1,545 m. The forest in this region is currently well preserved and the region above 500 m is included in the National Park of Serra da Bocaina.

Source: Pombal, J.P. Jr. (2001) *Amphibia-Reptilia*, 22(2), 179–185.

Massacre of Galapagos sea lions

On 14 July 2001, 15 sub-adult and adult Galapagos sea lions *Zalophus wollebaeki* were found slaughtered in a colony on the outskirts of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. The bodies of 11 males had been mutilated and their genitals removed. The apparent reason for the attack was to obtain the male penis which is worth about \$50 on the Asian market because of its supposed properties as an aphrodisiac. There was widespread local condemnation of the attack, and a reward of \$4,000 was offered for information leading to the conviction of the guilty party. This has not yet led to an arrest.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), 42(9), 705.

New bird species discovered in Colombian Andes

A new bird species, the chestnut-capped piha *Lipaugus weberi*, has been discovered in the Central Cordillera of the Colombian Andes. The medium sized thrush-like bird appears to be most closely related to other piha species in the area such as the dusky piha and the screaming piha. The species is restricted to pre-montane forest, and is presently known from only four localities. This means that the species, although considered to be relatively widespread, is highly localised. This restricted range and habitat preference means that it is already of significant conservation concern because much of its habitat has been severely deforested and fragmented. Conservation action has

been attempted, including discouraging deforestation at its known localities, but this is proving difficult where the demand for cash-crop commodities is high. As a result, the species is considered at enough risk to be recommended for an IUCN Red List status of Endangered.

Source: Cuervo, A.M. *et al.* (2001) *Ibis*, 143, 353–368.

Australia/Antarctica/ New Zealand

New federal bill protecting wildlife in Australia

On 29 June 2001 the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Wildlife Protection) Bill 2001* passed through both houses of parliament in Canberra, Australia. The new bill will drastically increase the Federal Government's capacity to enforce wildlife protection laws, making it easier to prosecute illegal importing of endangered species, whale bone products and rhino and tiger parts. The overall effectiveness of the bill will depend on provision of resources, both financial and personnel, as well as a review of the National Exotic Birds Registration Scheme that will be undertaken by TRAFFIC Oceania prior to the legislation coming into force in December 2001.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2001), 17, 2 (also at <http://www.traffic.org/publications>).

Australia launches national coastal rescue programme

Australia has launched the largest national business-community partnership to address the issue of coastal rehabilitation and protection. The programme, Shell Coastal Volunteers, is a partnership between Shell Australia and Conservation Volunteers Australia, with Shell contributing nearly \$1 million. One hundred urban and regional projects per year will tackle pollution problems and threats to Australia's coastlines. Project teams will undertake practical activities such as weed removal, access control, replanting, seed collection and floral and faunal surveys. Conservation Volunteers Australia is the country's largest practical conservation organization and it will manage

thousands of volunteers during the three-year programme.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2001), 42(8), 675.

Sweaters for penguins

The Tasmanian Conservation Trust is using knitted sweaters to clothe tiny fairy penguins on Phillip Island off the southern coast of Australia. The sweaters prevent the penguins from preening themselves after they have been affected by oil spills and illegal bilge pumping by commercial ships. The sweaters also keep the birds warm. Volunteers from as far away as Japan have knitted 1,000 of the tiny sweaters, and the project's coordinators plan to collect 2,000 more that they will add to the Oil Response Kits put together by the Australian Parks and Wildlife Service.

Source: *Audubon* (2001), 103(5), 15.

Landmark decision for forests in New Zealand

In May 2001 the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Helen Clark, announced that all 130,000 ha of indigenous forests managed by Timberlands' West Coast Ltd would be protected and transferred to the Department of Conservation. These forests include some of New Zealand's best surviving remnants of lowland rainforest, and provide habitat for threatened wildlife such as the Okarito brown kiwi, giant land snail and long-tailed bat. The campaign to protect these forests began in the 1970s following the Forest Service's ongoing clear-felling of podocarp forest and its conversion to pine plantation.

Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation News* (2001), 123, 1 (also at <http://www.forest-bird.org.nz/index.asp>).

Threat from the aquaculture industry

The promotion of mussels as a healthy seafood product is posing a serious threat to large areas of the coastline of New Zealand. Aquaculture schemes in New Zealand currently occupy 4,000 ha of coastal waters and the New Zealand Aquaculture Council aims to increase this to at least 17,000 ha by 2020. The *ad hoc* proliferation of large marine farms is considered a major threat to coastal ecosystems, especially on rocky coasts. It impairs boating and other recreation and can affect wildlife such as penguins. By law, coastal occupation charges can

be levied on marine farms and funds raised by these charges must be used to promote sustainable management. This is, however, rarely done.

Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation News* (2001), 123, 2.

Recently described native spinach is critically endangered

A miniature native spinach *Atriplex hollowayi* that was described in 2001 is now one of the most seriously threatened plants in New Zealand. This plant now only occurs at Waikuku and Whareana beaches in the Far North of New Zealand. The current small population sizes are limited by storm cycles that have increased in intensity in the past four years as a result of severe El Nino/La Nina weather cycles. Only 15 plants were found in 2001. Quad bikes and other off-road vehicles have probably driven the plant to extinction on

more accessible beaches, and only the remoteness of Waikuku and Whareana has saved the plants from a similar fate.

Source: *Forest & Bird* (2001), 301, 6.

Himalayan thar threaten World Heritage Area

Himalayan thar are threatening endangered plants in the World Heritage Area of the central Southern Alps in New Zealand. These introduced animals are not allowed to roam in National Parks but the Department of Conservation has experimented with leaving herds of thar for recreational hunters to shoot. Thar were introduced to New Zealand in 1904. The Southern Alps have a rich alpine flora composed almost entirely of endemic plants that have evolved without any browsing mammals. Grazing pressure from thar and chamois are having severe impacts on tussock species and palatable plants such as mountain

buttercups. There are ongoing debates as to the best method of dealing with the increasing thar population.

Source: *Forest & Bird* (2001), 301, 30–34.

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