Fiji's long-legged warbler seen again after 109 years

The last definite record of the long-legged warbler *Trichocichla rufa* on the main Fijian island of Viti Levu was in 1894. In December 2003 a survey team that included BirdLife International Fiji discovered 12 pairs. The long-legged warbler is a large brown warbler, notable for its long tail and long pink legs. It is a monospecific genus endemic to Fiji, but closely related to other long-legged warblers of the forest floor and undergrowth on other Melanesian islands. Known from just four specimens taken in 1890–1894 on Viti Levu, a second subspecies *T. rufa clunei* was discovered on the second largest island of Vanua Levu in 1974, and there have been a handful of recent unconfirmed reports.

The lack of records lead to concern that the species had been exterminated by introduced predators, notably rats and mongooses. All ground-nesting birds on Viti Levu (up to 15 species of rails and seabirds) have been extirpated by the small Indian mongoose *Herpestes auropunctatus,* which was introduced to control rats in sugar cane plantations. Although assumed to spend much of its time on the ground, the nest site of the long-legged warbler and its susceptibility to mammalian predators is unknown. Alternatively, it may be naturally very rare and unobtrusive. Small ground birds such as this are difficult to find and survey unless the calls are known (the 1974 record was of a bird mist-netted but never seen in the field) and relatively little fieldwork has been undertaken in Fiji's mountains. Although the long-legged warbler has been previously categorized as Critically Endangered, its current categorization as Data Deficient reflects the possibility that it is just rare and overlooked.

BirdLife International, with sponsorship from the European Community and the UK government's Darwin Initiative, is researching Fiji's threatened and endemic birds to identify key conservation areas. The importance of these Important Bird Areas (IBAs) is being communicated to local communities and government in an effort to plan and manage them for biodiversity conservation. The long-legged warbler is an important indicator species, and the BirdLife team were delighted to finally find this species on a field trip to the remote Wabu Forest Reserve. Several Fijian conservation institutions have cooperated with the Institute of Applied Sciences at the University of the South Pacific to survey the biodiversity of Wabu as part of the Pacific Biodiversity Transect, a project seeking to document baseline biodiversity against which future changes can be monitored.

The first long-legged warbler to be seen for 109 years was mobbing a mongoose, and the team later discovered a pair with a fledgling in the area. Although encouraging to note that this bird had fledged successfully despite mongoose activity, it was disappointing to note mongooses at this site several kilometres from the nearest (abandoned) logging road. These birds called often and the team tape-recorded several songs and calls. Recognizing the songs is the key to surveying this species, and the team found a total of 12 pairs within 2 km of their campsite. Moreover, the song had been heard previously at other survey sites but the team will need to return to confirm these additional localities. The song is short but clear and harmonic, and perhaps this is the reason why the local people, unfamiliar with this rare and secretive species, called it the Manu Kalou or Spirit Bird in the 1890s.

From these preliminary results, it would appear that the long-legged warbler is locally common at Wabu and perhaps elsewhere in the mountains. Nearly all were recorded in dense vegetation beside rocky streams between 800–1,000 m altitude, a habitat rarely surveyed. But until more birds are found at additional sites, its conservation status remains a concern and conservation of Wabu Forest Reserve must be a priority.

BirdLife is now working with the Department of Forestry to help ensure the long-term protection of this forest. Most accessible forests in Fiji are threatened by logging, and many have been lost to mahogany plantations. BirdLife is also working with the local landowning communities to consolidate their interest in conserving the forest and to investigate ways of supporting ecotourism initiatives. In Fiji, as in most of the Pacific, sustainable conservation requires strong community support. The interest and commitment of the community members who joined this survey and saw the long-legged warbler bodes well for the long-term conservation of both the bird and the forest.

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The Endangered huemul or south Andean deer *Hippocamelus bisulcus*

Huemul deer found dead in a Patagonian farmhouse

The first judicial case related to the protection of wildlife species and particularly to the Endangered huemul or south Andean deer *Hippocamelus bisulcus* is currently underway in Chile.

The huemul inhabits the southern Andes of Chile and neighbouring parts of Argentina. It was previously abundant in the Chilean Andes between Rancagua (Region VI, 34°S) and Magallanes (Region XII, 54°S), but is now restricted to the southern part of this range. The total estimated population is <2,000 individuals, living in isolated and fragmented subpopulations, and it is consequently categorized as Endangered on the IUCN Red List and in the Red Book of Chilean Terrestrial Vertebrates. The huemul is a flagship species and the national symbol of Chile, featuring in the national coat of arms. Because the conservation of the huemul is considered a high priority, research has been carried out on this species since 1974.

The Huemul Ecology Research for Conservation Planning Project, a 3-year study, started in August 2000 and is funded by the Darwin Initiative, involving a partnership between British and Chilean institutions. Whilst carrying out the work of the project, the poaching of an adult huemul was discovered in September 2002 when personnel of the Project received a signal from the radio collar signifying that the huemul was dead. The signal was traced to a farmer's house, located adjacent to one of the study sites, which is not a protected area. The deer was a female captured and collared a few months previously; she was named Lenga by the research team, and belonged to a deer group that was regularly monitored by the staff. The suspected reason for killing the huemul was to provide food for the farmer's dogs. When approached about the presence of a dead huemul or its collar, the farmer denied any knowledge of the matter, although the signal definitively came from his barn. A court order was obtained for local police to search the property. Project staff were present during the search, and used their radio receiver to locate the collar, which had been hidden behind furniture in an outbuilding. In addition to the radio collar, the skins of a young huemul (possibly the female's fawn) and fox were found. The case was widely covered by Chilean newspaper and radio but the judge's decision is still pending.

This case is serving to increase awareness of the threats to the huemul, and to demonstrate the legal consequences of poaching to the farming community in Patagonia, many of whom still regard poaching as a cultural practice. Under the Chilean Hunting Law the penalty for killing a protected animal can be involve a prison term or a heavy fine. This case has been promoted as illustrative of the potential to change human attitudes towards wildlife through the establishment of environmental education initiatives.

Research on huemul ecology for conservation planning

The huemul is protected in 13 Chilean national parks and reserves managed by the Chilean state body Corporación Nacional Forestal (CONAF), primarily in Chilean Patagonia. The conservation of the huemul is considered a high priority by CONAF, although protection is considered inadequate due to the small size of the reserves and inadequate coverage of the protected area network. The main factors that affect the huemul are the loss and alteration of natural habitat by forest fires that occurred during the 1940s, logging and farming, poaching, disturbance and predation by domestic dogs, diseases introduced from livestock, and natural predation by puma *Puma concolor*.

In August 2000 a 3-year project funded by the Darwin Initiative commenced, developed jointly by CONAF and Raleigh International. Other institutions such as UK Forest Research, the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile were also involved at various stages, and there was additional funding from the Wellcome Trust. The purpose was to carry out research on the ecology of the huemul in order to ensure its survival in Chilean Patagonia. Four study sites were selected and extensive training of Chilean field researchers and park rangers in deer capture and radio-tracking techniques was undertaken. Sixteen individuals (males and females) were collared and tracked, and information on huemul movements, home range, and habitat use has been obtained.

As one of the final activities, the project undertook a conference to present the results of this research. The workshop involved 50 participants from Chile, UK, Argentina, Uruguay, Canada and the US, held in Cochrane over the 20–24 October 2003. The main results were presented by Dr. Robin Gill from UK Forest Research, Cristian Saucedo, project co-ordinator from CONAF, Chile, and Dr. Susana Gonzalez, Chairman of the IUCN Deer Specialist group, Uruguay. The participants discussed handling and capture, health status and dietary investigations, interactions between huemul and man, huemul genetics, past and present huemul distribution, and huemul conservation in protected areas. As a result of the workshop, the Huemul National Conservation Plan was discussed and the decision to turn it into a more active programme was made, with the creation

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of a follow-up committee. For additional information, visit the IUCN Deer Specialist Group web page at http://www.iibce.edu.uy/citogenetica/deer

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Recent study identifies the possible existence of a forgotten species

Meijaard & Groves (2004, *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society*, 140(1), 63–102) investigated the morphological differences between South-east Asian species of mouse deer (*Tragulus* spp.). Their research showed that there are three species groups: the *T. javanicus/T. kanchil* group, the *T. napu* group, and *T. versicolor*. *T. versicolor*, previously regarded as a subspecies of *T. napu*, from Nhatrang, central Vietnam, is craniometrically distinct from both *T. javanicus* and *T. napu* and thus is neither a subspecies of *T. napu*, as conventionally regarded, nor can it be allocated to either of the two widespread species groups. In addition, skin colouration pattern and roughness of neck hair are unlike any other mouse deer.

T. versicolor is known only from a handful of museum specimens, and there are no recent records of this species from Vietnam. We therefore consider it important to investigate the status of this species in the wild to see whether it still exists and, if so, whether it can be saved from extinction. For that purpose we hereby provide a brief description of what is known about *T. versicolor*.

The skin colouration sets it apart from any of the other known forms. There is a marked contrast between the pelage colour of the anterior half of the upperparts, which is yellowish-brown, and the posterior half, starting behind the shoulders, which is clear grey. Another differentiating character, which we observed in the type of *T. versicolor*, is the absence of the dark collar which is present in almost all *T. javanicus*, *T. kanchil* and *T. napu* specimens. Furthermore, none of the other *Tragulus* specimens that we have seen had throat hair as coarse as that of *T. versicolor.*

All four known specimens of *T. versicolor* were collected in the neighbourhood of Nhatrang, Vietnam, a coastal city located at 12°15'N 109°10'E. *T. versicolor* is not the only species of mouse deer in the Nhatrang area, and *T. kanchil affinis* also occurs there. The main external differences between *T. kanchil* and *T. versicolor* are distinctive, and it is likely that, if *T. versicolor* still exists, local hunters will know both species.

We hope that this note will encourage research and conservation organizations working in Vietnam to conduct a survey of *T. versicolor*. A good start would be to conduct village and market interviews in the Nhatrang area, asking people about the types of mouse deer that they know and ask them to describe differences. If the species still exists, a more detailed survey would be required to determine its distribution range. Such a survey does not need to be expensive, but it could potentially mean the difference between unnoticed extinction and survival.

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New National Park in Northern Sumatra

On 31 December 31 a new National Park in Northern Sumatra, Batang Gadis (108,000 ha), was declared in a letter signed by local leaders, including the head of the local government and heads of the local parliament, police, and Forestry Department, and community leaders. Batang Gadis is one of the first parks of its kind in Indonesia, established under a new legal framework that allows declaration of a National Park by local government officials. Most Parks previously have been declared in a more top-down process initiated by the national government. It is expected that a letter of approval will be issued within the next few months by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, which will allow the Park to receive national government funding.

One recent impetus for this declaration was the severe flooding that killed approximately 200 people in the North Sumatra resort area of Bukit Lawang in November. This disaster brought a great deal of attention to the issue of illegal logging, and helped local stakeholders to realize their responsibility for protection of the local environment and natural resources. This declaration is particularly important because it comes from local stakeholders who already support the Park's establishment and who feel a sense of ownership in the process, rather than something imposed by the national government.

The initiative gained further momentum at the United in Diversity Forum in Bali early in December, when the governor of North Sumatra informally presented the idea to Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri over lunch. Her enthusiastic response to his proposal was 'Do it – take action.' Conservation International is working closely with the Governor and the head (*bupati*) of the Mandailing regency, as well as local stakeholders,

to move ahead with a park management plan and to assist with its implementation.

The Batang Gadis National Park is thought to house Sumatran rhino, elephant, Malayan tapir and other key species. Batang Gadis lies at the southern end of the Northern Sumatra Corridor and is an integral part of a 400,000-ha area in the Angkola region, which Conservation International is working to secure and protect with partners.

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The first privatization of a wildlife area in Malawi

Malawi has five National Parks and four Game Reserves, the latter now called Wildlife Areas, occupying 11% of its land area. Malawi is a densely populated country and all its so-called Protected Areas are under tremendous pressure from poaching, illegal timber extraction and encroachment, exacerbated by lack of funding that results in poor law enforcement, corruption, poor governance and lack of political will.

Majete Wildlife Area in the Lower Shire Valley covers an area of 691 km^2 and was gazetted as a Game Reserve in 1955 after the newly formed Nyasaland Fauna Protection Society (now the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi) campaigned for its protection. Since that time Majete has been under enormous poaching pressure resulting in most of the large mammals being extirpated, including an estimated 200 elephants, the last of which were killed in 1991. In March 2003 an agreement was signed between the Government of Malawi and African Parks (Majete) Ltd granting the management of Majete to the latter for a period of 25 years. The Malawi Government also undertook to assist with the restocking of the Reserve by allowing African Parks to capture animals in other National Parks and Protected Areas, with the Company meeting the cost of capture and transportation.

The capture operation started in August 2003 with the arrival of a capture team from South African National Parks and the private game capture sector. Two male black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis*, 98 waterbuck *Kobus ellipsiprymnus*, 99 sable antelope *Hippotragus niger*, 107 impala *Aepyceros melampus*, and 50 warthog *Phacochoerus aethiopicus*, were translocated from Liwonde National Park into Majete. A further 104 impala, 10 warthog, 5 nyala *Tragelaphus angasi*, and 120 buffalo *Syncerus caffer*, were translocated from Lengwe National Park, making a total of 595 successfully translocated animals. African Parks (Majete) Ltd intend to construct two tourist lodges, game viewing roads, camp-sites and provide other tourist facilities.

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Discovery of a new population of the spotted lizard of the Canary Islands

Over the last 30 years several species of supposedly extinct endemic giant lizards have been rediscovered in the western islands of the Archipelago of the Canaries: the giant lizard *Gallotia simonyi* of El Hierro in 1974, the Canarian spotted lizard *G. intermedia* on Tenerife in 1996, and the giant lizard *G. gomerana* of La Gomera in 1999. These three species form a monophyletic group of closely related species (the *simonyi* group) with restricted distributions and very small wild populations. All of them are considered threatened and are protected by Spanish legislation.

Until recently only a small population of *c.* 370 Canarian spotted lizards were known, at Teno in northwest Tenerife, but in April 2003 a new population was discovered by A. Betoret on the cliffs of Montaña de Guaza, near the southernmost point of the island, 30 km from Teno. The size of the new population is unknown but at least 15 lizards have been observed, three of which have been examined and liberated. Preliminary DNA analysis of one lizard from Guaza indicates that it is the same as lizards from two subpopulations at Teno (M. Hernández, pers. comm.).

The conservation status of this new population is still unclear but it is presumed to be threatened due to its limited distribution, surrounding tourism developments, and the presence of alien predators such rats *Rattus* spp. and cats *Felis catus*. Feral cats are known to prey upon extant giant lizards species and are probably the main cause of their population decline. The cliffs of Montaña de Guaza are within a protected area. The local environmental authorities have been informed of the existence of the new population in order that they may adopt adequate conservation measures and promote further studies of the population.

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The harmonization of National Red Lists in Europe

An international seminar on the harmonization of National Red Lists in Europe was held on 27–28 November 2002 at the National Museum of Natural

History (Naturalis) in Leiden, the Netherlands, and the proceedings of this seminar were published in December 2003. The seminar was organised by the Institute of Environmental Sciences in Leiden and the Netherlands Committee for IUCN in cooperation with the IUCN Red List Programme. The seminar was attended by more than 70 participants from 23 European countries, including botanists and zoologists, European members of the Species Survival Commission and IUCN, and policy makers and politicians. The objectives of the seminar were to become acquainted with the revised IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria and the regional application guidelines, to exchange experiences in applying the Categories and Criteria and Regional Application Guidelines, and to discuss recommendations for harmonisation of national Red Listing across Europe. Some of the important discussions and conclusions are briefly reported here.

It became clear during the seminar that the many regional or national European Red Lists have a high variability in purpose, composition, geographical coverage, and categories and criteria used. Red Lists are rarely used for European ecological networks and play only a modest role in the updating of the annexes of the Habitats and the Birds Directives of the European Community. It also became clear that harmonization can only be reached on a voluntary basis, as Red Lists are often embedded in local legislation.

The importance of using Red Lists on a small scale for local nature conservation policy was emphasized, using examples such as the country Red Lists in the UK and the Provincial Red Data Books in Spain. It was noted that at smaller scales the issue of edge effects of the area of occupancy will play a greater role, causing a bias in Red Listing, but the regional application guidelines may partly compensate for this bias.

It was noted that harmonization of Red Lists in Europe can take place in several ways: (1) The present Red Lists can be re-classified using the new IUCN categories and criteria, as is already happening in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Switzerland. (2) Additional lists can be established for populations of European importance, as has been done for Red Lists in the Netherlands, Germany and UK. (3) The upgrading or downgrading of species on National Red Lists, depending on their status in Europe, using the Regional Application Guidelines.

Recent testing of national Red Lists with the new IUCN categories and criteria has shown that their application may result in some taxa losing their National Red List status. It was stressed that the Red Lists consider the extinction risk of species only, and that for conservation priorities many other factors have to be taken into account, such as public support and the availability of funds. In this respect the political significance of national Red Lists was also stressed. A general recommendation was that, instead of reviewing the Red Lists every 15 years, annual updates need to be provided on the internet, as with the global IUCN Red List.

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First steps for the Lower Choper Nature Park, Russia

Six nature parks have recently been established in the Volgograd region of southern Russia. They cover an area of >600,000 ha. The Lower Choper (Nizhnechopersky) Nature Park established in March 2003 is the largest of the new parks. Originally the law approved by the Duma (regional parliament) of the Volgograd region in April 2002 provided the legal basis for land use control and conservation of 80,000 ha in the Kumilzhensky administrative district. But authorities of the neighbouring Alexeevsky and Nekhaevsky districts then applied to the Committee of Environment Conservation to include the most valuable places of their districts in the new Park. All of the areas are closely connected, and united by similar climate, landscapes, flora and fauna, economy, traditions and the mode of life of the local Cossacks.

In Kumilzhensky district the areas between the Don, Choper, Medveditsa and Kumilga rivers with flood plain woodlands and meadows, sands, upland oak woodlands and surviving plots of pristine steppe are included in the Park. In Alexeevsky district the areas include flood plain meadows with lakes and sand terraces, black alder forests, and upland woods. In Nekhaevsky district the areas include pristine steppe, flood plains, and an area of flood plain meadows with a rich flora and many rare species along the Akishevka river. The final total area of the Park will be about 186,000 ha.

The organization and administration of the Park is just beginning, along with work on zonation of the Park's territory, and identification of the main natural units and of places that require special protection. Educational activity with local school children is beginning. Research is now required to provide detailed information to guide conservation planning. The remoteness of the region of the lower Choper river, far from industrial centres, is what has led to the survival of unique landscapes and flora and fauna that are found nowhere else in Russia, and also to the distinctive way of life of local Cossacks. The establishment of the Park was particularly urgent because the landscape and habitats of the steppe are becoming more and more influenced by human activity.

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