

Mahogany – progress or pessimism?

In November 2002 the Conference of the Parties to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) voted to list big-leaf mahogany *Swietenia macrophylla* on Appendix II of the Convention. As described previously in *Oryx* (38(1), 84–90), this presented a huge challenge, given the very high levels of illegality in the mahogany trade and the total lack of precedent for implementing a CITES Appendix II listing for a major timber species. In order to assist with implementation of the listing, the International Tropical Timber Organization organized a capacity building workshop, held in Pucallpa, Peru, during 17–21 May 2004. The workshop was well attended by government, trade and NGO representatives (including Fauna & Flora International) from major producer and consumer countries, as well as international organizations such as Centre for International Forestry Research, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and CITES.

Mahogany production in Bolivia has decreased substantially since the late 1990s, when it was the leading producer, and with production still suspended in Brazil, much of the discussion focussed on Peru, currently the largest exporter. It was clear from the outset that, although the Appendix II listing officially came into force on 15 November 2003, mechanisms and processes to ensure its implementation are not yet in place and there is still some way to go to ensure that all traded wood comes from legal, never mind non-detrimental, sources.

Although the new forest law introduced in Peru in 2000 has improved the legal framework to regulate logging, illegality is still widespread. Workshop participants stressed the severe lack of capacity of both the CITES management and scientific authorities to control this extremely high value trade. Other impediments to making a robust non-detriment finding (as required by CITES for Appendix II species) include a lack of baseline information on mahogany stocks, lack of a body to supervise forest concessions (legislation to create such a body is currently being revised) and the inaccessibility of data on forests. Two loopholes in the law in Peru that facilitate the laundering of illegally cut wood were also highlighted.

Since the suspension of mahogany logging and trading in Brazil in 2001, new laws for extraction on private lands have been introduced, and at the time of the workshop, nine management plans had been submitted to the authorities for approval. Brazil is currently piloting a

high-tech monitoring system, in which every logging truck would be equipped with a computer and Global Positioning System, to facilitate tracking of logs and compliance of harvesting operations with management plans. Although the will on the part of the government to control this trade seems unquestionable, it remains to be seen whether the measures introduced will be adequate, given the huge territories and the high stakes involved. The meeting did give some cause for optimism, however. The active participation of mahogany loggers and traders, both exporters and importers, was seen as very positive, and some traders agreed to work with WWF on trying to guarantee legal and sustainable sources of timber. US importers also offered to investigate the potential for them to provide finance for forest inventories in Peru, to provide the baseline information for robust non-detriment findings for the species.

It was claimed by the Timber Trade Federation (the UK trade body) representative that CITES lacks credibility in the market place amongst traders and consumers. The successful implementation of the Appendix II listing for mahogany is a crucial test of the usefulness of the Convention as a tool to help regulate the international timber trade, currently so beset with illegality and unsustainable practices. While achieving the Appendix II listing of the species represents for some the culmination of many years hard work, it is in fact just the beginning. International assistance, both financial and technical, and a continued focus on the timber by NGOs and consumers, is essential to ensure that the listing achievement is translated into real control of the international trade in this species.

As a contribution to this, Fauna & Flora International and the Nicaraguan government are organizing a workshop on making non-detriment findings for mahogany in Nicaragua, with funding from the UK Government's Flagship Species Fund. The workshop will take place in November 2004.

Georgina Magin
Sustainable Wood Use Project Manager, Fauna & Flora International
Great Eastern House, Tenison Road, Cambridge, CB1 2TT, UK
E-mail georgina.magin@fauna-flora.org

Scientists join forces to save the Endangered Andean mountain cat

High in the Andean deserts of Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina a little known felid, the Endangered Andean

mountain cat *Oreailurus jacobita*, stalks its prey on steep, rocky hillsides. This is one of the most threatened cats in the world, with possibly <1,000 individuals in the wild and none known to be in captivity. Interviews with local inhabitants tell of a sustained and drastic decline in the Andean cat population over the last 50 years. This decline may be due to the near extinction of its main prey, the short-tailed chinchilla *Chinchilla brevicaudata*, hunted for its fur in the first half of the 20th century. Alternatively, the decline may be due to hunting by indigenous people for traditional ceremonies, habitat fragmentation caused by human population growth, or hunting for other reasons. In this remote, harsh environment it is difficult to collect information on such a rare and elusive carnivore. Research is needed to understand the biology and ecology of this species and to determine the current distribution so that conservation initiatives can be identified, prioritized and implemented (but see *Oryx*, 37(3), 374–377).

In October 2003 South American biologists created Alianza Gato Andino (AGA), or the Andean Cat Alliance, to work together to conserve the Andean mountain cat throughout its range. The first AGA meeting was held in April 2004 in Arica, Chile, where 13 participants representing seven countries, including the four range countries, gathered to review current threats and collaborate on future conservation efforts. During the meeting AGA members drafted the Andean Cat Conservation Action Plan. The Action Plan will be published by September 2004 and used as the foundation for future conservation initiatives. Specific objectives linked to the current known threats are: (1) Determine the current distribution and relative abundance of Andean cat populations, and the threats that affect the species and its ecosystem. (2) Carry out research to produce basic information on Andean cat biology and ecology. (3) Mitigate impacts of human activities on the Andean cat and its ecosystem through community participation and education. (4) Strengthen the management of protected areas in which the Andean cat is present, promote the establishment of new areas or corridors and encourage the development of conservation initiatives in the region. (5) Promote the implementation and adequacy of conservation legislation and policies regarding the Andean cat and its ecosystem. (6) Continuously evaluate the actions developed during the implementation of this plan.

Range-wide and country specific projects are proposed under each objective and included in the Action Plan. Individual projects may use a variety of methods to reach their goals including field surveys, camera trapping, DNA analysis, radio-telemetry studies, community-based conservation programmes, promotion and management of protected areas, educational programmes and materials, and legislative lobbying. Basic field

surveys will be conducted throughout the entire range, with an emphasis on the most northern and southern portions where no surveys have been carried out and almost nothing is known about the presence or absence of the Andean cat. More detailed surveys and biological and ecological studies will be concentrated in the central portion of the species' range where the cats are known from recent sightings and records. Conservation initiatives will be carried out at the local, regional, and national levels in all four range countries.

Wildlife Conservation Network, a non-profit organization focused on funding community-based wildlife conservationists, sponsored the meeting and facilitated the development of the Conservation Action Plan. The Network is actively fundraising to provide the resources to implement the Action Plan, and is committed to assisting AGA in its effort to ensure the survival of one of the world's most elusive cats.

Elaine Iverson

Wildlife Conservation Network, 25745 Bassett Lane
Los Altos, CA 94022, USA

E-mail elaine@wildnet.org

Marine 'citizen science' initiative to collect data for conservation

On 27 July 2004 a new 'citizen science' initiative, called Earthdive, was launched in which all SCUBA divers and snorkellers are being urged to record the health of the marine environment, including coral reefs, mangrove swamps and coastal waters. The scheme was developed in conjunction with the United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) in Cambridge, UK, and is supported by Coral Cay Conservation. The key feature of the scheme centres on encouraging members to record findings from their dives on the Earthdive website (<http://www.earthdive.com>). By doing this, they will be contributing data on key indicator species to build a Global Dive Log, which is being sponsored by P&O. The Global Dive Log is a database into which divers and snorkellers log sightings of key indicator species and human impacts via online logbooks. Observations of the illegal trade in endangered species are also being recorded, and these are then passed on to TRAFFIC. An online positioning system and Global Positioning System capability enables data to be fixed to specific map references and then searched and analysed via UNEP-WCMC's interactive map service (IMapS). As divers and snorkellers log their underwater observations on the Global Dive Log, their logs will together create a unique and evolving global snapshot of the world's oceans that can be used by decision makers and stakeholders. Earthdive is also

seeking to effect positive change towards a more sustainable marine environment by raising global awareness and financial support for marine conservation. Members sign an international petition, demanding action to protect the oceans; this will be delivered to the United Nations in 2005. Funding comes directly from contributions made by Earthdive members, with 50% of all membership revenue going directly to Coral Cay Conservation and UNEP-WCMC. UNEP-WCMC is developing a range of tools and methodologies such as IMapS and Earthdive that will allow the public to pinpoint locations and log observations with the aim of extending world biodiversity monitoring. For more information contact Benjamin Caldecott, UNEP-WCMC; E-mail ben.caldecott@unep-wcmc.org

Four new protected areas in Brazil – nearly 500,000 hectares

On 3 June 2004, the Brazilian Minister of the Environment, Marina Silva, announced the creation of four new protected areas: two National Forests and two Extractive Reserves in the states of Paraná (Piraí do Sul National Forest, 125 ha), Paraíba (Restinga do Cabedelo, 103 ha), Maranhão (Cururupu Extractive Reserve, 185,000 ha) and Amazonas (Capanã Grande Extractive Reserve, 304,000 ha). Capanã Grande is one of the protected areas foreseen in the ARPA (Amazon Region Protected Areas) programme of WWF Brazil, which is working towards the creation of 50 million ha of new protected areas in the Amazon over the next 10 years. Eighteen million ha are planned for the first phase of the program (2002–2006), which is supported by the Global Environment Facility of the World Bank, the KfW Bankengruppe, and the Brazilian government. At the government ceremony creating these reserves, representatives of the state governments of Acre, Amazonas, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia and Tocantins signed cooperative agreements regarding the implementation of ARPA.

*Anthony Rylands, Conservation International
E-mail a.rylands@conservation.org*

UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee met recently in Suzhou, China, to assess progress in protection of sites of global significance, and to consider proposals for new additions to the list of World Heritage Sites. Among the new sites inscribed were the Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra, comprising 2.5 million ha in three national

parks, and 553,000 ha in eight protected areas comprising the Cape Floral Region Protected Areas of South Africa. In addition to the new sites, a number of existing sites were listed on the World Heritage List in Danger, including 13 natural areas, 10 of them in Africa. The Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas, inscribed as China's first Natural World Heritage Site in 2003, was also briefly considered for listing as in Danger because of threats from numerous proposed hydroelectric projects. The World Heritage Committee adopted a resolution expressing serious concern about the continuing threats to all of the Natural World Heritage Sites in the Congo, all five of which are under threat from human activities, including encroachment, mining, poaching and ivory trafficking. The Committee called for the Transition Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo to pull all military personnel out of the national parks and their immediate vicinities, and called on the UN to put pressure on Sudan People's Liberation Army officials to halt poaching by their fighters.

*Bill Bleisch
China Programme Manager, Fauna & Flora International
E-mail bill.bleisch@fauna-flora.org*

The Society for Conservation Biology's Annual Meeting 2004

The Society for Conservation Biology's (SCB) Annual Meeting was held over 29 July to 2 August 2004 at Columbia University, New York, hosted by the Center for Environmental Research and Conservation. The theme was Conservation in an Urbanizing World. With over 1,500 delegates, the meeting was SCB's largest yet. There were eight parallel sessions, with the effect that one person's experience of the conference was very different from another's.

As we wove our individual paths through the programme, the theme of urbanization was rarely encountered in the contributed papers. It informed the morning plenary sessions and many of the symposia (e.g. back-to-back symposia on urban markets for bushmeat, and a symposium on managing urban growth and landscape change). Instead we were treated to a snapshot of the state of the art in conservation research. This included a talk or two that opened people's eyes to new ideas, a majority that were solid and interesting, and some that contained flawed science or had no discernable research questions.

In my biased view the theme that seemed the strongest was that of monitoring and evaluation of conservation effectiveness. A well-attended symposium organised by Nick Salafsky and M. Sajayan (Conservation Measures Partnership) revolved around the need to have clear

and transparent standards for project evaluation. The initiative is backed by influential NGOs, and so should lead to substantial improvements in accountability and comparability of conservation spending outcomes. It will be a mark of conservation's maturity as a discipline when monitoring and evaluation results are reported as a matter of course, much as statistical significance is now, rather than it being necessary to evangelize about basic good practice in project management. Similarly, a rigorous approach to conservation decisions will hopefully become the norm rather than the exception.

There were excellent contributed papers on monitoring and rational decision-making scattered through the programme. The paper that I enjoyed most, by Scott Field and co-authors from the Ecology Centre (University of Queensland), addressed the balance between type I and type II errors when deciding whether or not a decline is occurring in a population on the basis of survey data. It showed convincingly that standard significance tests are not a useful approach, but that the costs of each type of error should drive the choice of the power at which a decline is deemed to be occurring, and hence intervention is required. If a species is valuable enough, then the costs of a type II error may become so high that interventions should proceed without costly prior monitoring to establish whether they are necessary. The talk was based on a paper in press in *Ecology Letters*.

My second favourite paper of the small sub-sample that I listened to had a very different flavour, but was again given by an Australian, J. Ross Sinclair of the Wildlife Conservation Society. This described a project engaging with traditional performers at Papua New Guinea's cultural festivals; documenting the number of different endangered species parts in their costumes (primarily parrot and bird of paradise feathers), canvassing their attitudes to conservation, getting information on the trade in feathers and skins, and giving them advice and materials for storage techniques to improve the longevity of their costumes, based on museum best practice. A nice example of a positive intervention that starts the process of community and conservationist dialogue.

As always, the meeting's main business was done in the corridors and bars rather than the sessions themselves. The organizers worked hard to foster networking, with lots of sessions specifically aimed at students, and other events such as a womens' networking breakfast. I think their best achievement for networking, however, was to hold the meeting in a small and well-laid out space, where people couldn't help but bump into one another. All the conference abstracts are on the web, at <http://www.conbio.org/2004>. Next year's meeting is in Brasilia, and I hope that it will be as tempting to the

world's conservation scientists as a weekend in New York.

E.J. Milner-Gulland
Department of Environmental Science and Technology
Royal School of Mines, Imperial College London
Prince Consort Road, London, SW7 2BP, UK
E-mail e.j.milner-gulland@ic.ac.uk

Student Conference on Conservation Science

The Student Conference on Conservation Science, held again this year in the Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, UK, during 24–26 March 2004, has now become a regular feature of the conservation conference calendar. This fifth conference in the series attracted over 270 people, including 153 postgraduate students working in conservation science. Student delegates attended from 40 countries including, for the first time, students from Jamaica, Lithuania, Pakistan, Philippines, Seychelles and Taiwan. The conference included 35 talks and 58 posters by research students, and four plenary lectures, given by Gretchen Daily of Stanford (The conservation value of human-dominated countryside), Katherine Homewood of University College London (Policies, land use and wildlife in the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem), John Reynolds of the University of East Anglia (Life histories and conservation ecology of fishes), and Bob Watson of the World Bank (The science and politics of global environmental change and development). As usual a special feature of the conference was the role played by conservation practitioners, with a poster session on Who's Who in Conservation? at which 19 conservation agencies, institutes and NGOs displayed posters and provided staff to describe their work and answer queries. Staff of conservation agencies also attended the rest of the conference and participated in discussions with student delegates. Overall, the conference was visited by 72 staff from 28 conservation agencies, institutes, NGOs and other bodies. The next conference in the series will be held in Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, UK, during 22–24 March 2005.

New and improved internet resources

Global Biodiversity Information Facility: Biodiversity Data Portal (<http://www.gbif.net/portal/index.jsp>) is hosted by the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, an international organization committed to providing free and universal access to data on the world's diversity. The Portal provides access to biodiversity information from around the world, and taxonomic data organized by

Kingdom of Life, country, or data providers. The website is available in French, English, and Danish.

North American Bat Conservation Partnership: Literature Reference Database (<http://www.batcon.org/nabcp/newsite/index.html>), hosted by the North American Bat Conservation Partnership, features the Literature Reference Database, a service designed for bat researchers. The searchable Database includes listings for bat-related books, dissertations, reprints, and popular journal articles.

California State University – Stanislaus: Endangered Species Recovery Program (<http://esrp.csustan.edu/>) features the Endangered Species Recovery Program, a cooperative research programme on biodiversity conservation in central California, administered by California State University, Stanislaus Foundation. The website

includes sections on Current Projects and Research, Publications and Reports (available online), Endangered Species Profiles, and Digital Geospatial Resources.

Missouri Botanical Garden – Center for Plant Conservation: National Collection of Endangered Plants (http://www.centerforplantconservation.org/NC_Choice.html), hosted by the Missouri Botanical Garden, presents the Center for Plant Conservation (CPC) – National Collection of Endangered Plants, which contains plant material for more than 600 of the country's most imperiled native plants. The Collection website links to informative profiles for many endangered plants. Plant profile pages include Distribution and Occurrence, Protection, Conservation, Ecology, Research and References. The site can be searched by scientific name, common name, plant family, state range or CPC participating institution.