

International

Trees not so rude after all

The revelation early in January 2006 that trees were belching methane came as a shock to many, and led to calls that the use of trees to offset carbon emissions should be rethought. However, two new studies have shown that it is more of a hiccup than a belch, as the researchers take issue with the way in which the original data were scaled up from laboratory rates of methane production to global production rates. The new calculations suggest that the benefits of carbon storage by trees are 100 times as great as the disadvantages of methane emissions.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2560), 12–13.

Global warming sinks to ocean floor

Deep sea ecosystems rely on nutrients carried to the ocean floor from the shallow seas above. These nutrients, consisting of sediment and organic matter, are funnelled through huge submarine canyons, in a process previously thought to be triggered by landslides and river floods. It has now been discovered that seasonal ocean currents also play a role in the movement of these nutrients through the formation, at continental margins, of dense water as a result of cooling by wind and evaporation. Dense water formation will decrease if projected sea surface temperatures are correct, which will in turn significantly reduce the frequency and intensity of seasonal currents, thus affecting the deep sea ecosystems that depend on nutrients carried along with the currents.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2578), 21.

Damaged coral reefs can be glued back together

Research carried out in Florida has shown that coral reef restoration following mechanical damage is possible. Over the past 10 years the reefs around Florida have had eight major ship groundings. After each event marine biologists assessed the damage and

rescued as many viable coral colonies as they could from the affected area. Divers then attached the salvaged coral polyps onto the reef base using hydraulic cement or epoxy putty. In cases where the reef was severely damaged reef balls, concrete hemispheres riddled with large holes, were constructed, onto which surviving coral colonies were grafted. The problem of obtaining sufficient numbers of starter colonies is being addressed elsewhere; researchers in Israel have established a coral nursery in the Red Sea, using ‘nubbins’ collected from local reefs and growing them in trays on nets anchored to the sea bed. The success of this project has prompted the creation of more coral nurseries near ailing reefs in other areas.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2559), 28.

Arctic Ocean’s salt content declines

Global warming caused the Arctic Ocean to become less salty during the last half century, and this trend looks set to continue. The reasons for the decrease are the faster melting of sea ice and glaciers and an increase in rainfall over the Arctic. Between 1965 and 1995 increased rain and river flow alone resulted in an extra 20,000 km³ flowing into the Arctic Ocean, equivalent to 40 years’ flow of the Mississippi. The decrease in salinity raises fears that ocean currents may become affected in the future as they rely on the sinking of dense, salty water at high latitudes. Changes in ocean currents may cause temperatures in northern Europe to fall dramatically.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2567), 14.

Four times as many sharks killed for fins as reported in official figures

Data collected from inventories of shark fin sales at auction have revealed that at least four times as many sharks are killed for their fins as are reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Around 1.7 million t of shark fins are sold globally each year, which equates to 73 million sharks per year. This figure is much higher than the FAO’s estimate of 0.39 million t. The FAO cannot be blamed for the discrepancy in the data, but these figures do illustrate the inaccuracies that may be inherent in fisheries data.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2571), 7.

Wanted: heat missing from oceans

In contrast to the planet as a whole it seems that the oceans have been cooling down during the last 2 years. A network of 3,000 free-floating buoys, which monitor the world’s oceans, have yielded data showing that the upper 750 m of ocean lost enough energy between 2003 and 2005 to cause an overall drop in temperature of c. 0.02°C. Although this sounds small, the energy lost is enough to melt all of the world’s sea ice several times over. Thankfully, researchers are sure that this is not occurring, but where the energy is going is still a mystery. It is speculated that the heat is being radiated back into space, possibly because of the release of aerosols into the atmosphere from volcanic eruptions, or because of annual changes in cloud cover.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2572), 14.

Adult salmon pass on unsuitable lice to juveniles

Before the era of farmed salmon, juveniles did not meet adult salmon during their migration from rivers to the ocean, because the adults lived far out at sea. Now research shows that salmon farms, which hold adult salmon in pens just off the coast, are transferring sea lice to juvenile salmon as the latter pass the pens on their way to the sea. Researchers found that juvenile salmon migrating along the coast of British Columbia had low levels of infestation by sea lice until they reached the first fish farm, after which the infestation levels rose significantly. The researchers estimated that, based on the infestation levels they observed, sea lice from fish farms kill between 9–95% of migrating juvenile salmon.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2572), 17.

Sooty shearwaters’ record migration

Electronic tags attached to a small Pacific sea bird, the sooty shearwater, have revealed that its migration from breeding sites in New Zealand to winter feeding grounds in Japan, Alaska or California is the longest ever recorded by such a method. The annual trip of 64,370 km covers the entire Pacific region, and takes about 200 days, with the birds making a prolonged stop-over at only one location to refuel. The shearwaters traveled up to 910 km each day, and dived to depths of 68 m while feeding on route. The epic nature of the

shearwaters' migration means that the birds may be useful indicators of the effects of climate change or overfishing in the Pacific region.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/5242360.stm>

World's thirst needs action

WWF has reported that some of the world's most developed countries are facing water shortages, with economic wealth not automatically guaranteeing a sufficient water supply. Some cities, such as Houston and Sydney, are using more water than can be replenished, whereas others, such as London, are leaking huge quantities of water from aging water mains. Meanwhile, wealthy countries continue to use up water from the developing world because most of the goods supplied to developed countries, such as food, clothes and even jewellery, require water for their production. WWF has called on rich countries to set an example by tackling leaking mains and pollution, as well as encouraging more international cooperation over water.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/4796909.stm>

'Plant blindness' a growing problem, especially among industrialized nations

Research from the USA has identified a worrying phenomenon: the failure of people to be able to see or notice the plants that occur in their daily lives, known as 'plant blindness'. This is particularly prevalent among industrialized nations, where the movement of people to cities has decoupled the traditional association between people and agriculture and nature (see also *Oryx*, 37, 206–214). The researchers voice concerns that this detachment from nature has negative implications for those attempting to promote the conservation of plant diversity, halt habitat loss and promote sustainable living. However, they are optimistic that plant blindness is not an irreversible malaise, and that education work in botanic gardens has a major role to play in the reversing of this trend.

Source: *Botanic Gardens Conservation International press release* (28 August 2006).

Tuna groups tackle overfishing

The first international plan to try to stop the overfishing of tuna, which is facing commercial extinction, has been adopted by regulators meeting in Japan. The plan called for better monitoring and

coordination across regions, as well as action against illegal fishing. Although delegates from the world's five tuna bodies called the plan a first step towards arresting a decline in stocks, conservationists said the measures were not enough, blaming illegal and unregulated fishing and unsustainable quotas for tuna's dramatic decline. WWF has stated the delegates failed to agree on concrete action, and that their only agreement was to gather more data and talk more often.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/2/hi/asia-acific/6301187.stm>

UK in anti-whaling recruitment drive

The UK is stepping up attempts to secure an anti-whaling majority on the International Whaling Commission (IWC). In 2006 pro-hunting nations gained their first IWC majority for 20 years. The British government is publishing a brochure aimed at encouraging nations opposed to whaling to join the Commission. Japan, Iceland and Norway, the principal pro-whaling nations, believe that many stocks are large enough and that hunting can be sustainable, and they dismiss arguments that whales are special and distinct creatures as being relevant only in certain cultures. The issue was given added urgency by Iceland's decision in October to resume commercial hunting, a move that brought diplomatic protest from Britain and its allies.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/2/hi/science/nature/6301681.stm>

Further declines for the world's waterbirds

The January 2007 Wetlands International report, the fourth edition of *Waterbird Population Estimates*, presents estimates and trends for 878 waterbird species around the world. Of these 44% of populations for which trend data were available were found to be decreasing or have become extinct since the last edition was released in 2002. The report was based on annual field surveys by 15,000 voluntary observers across hundreds of sites worldwide, many of them Important Bird Areas. The new publication highlights how human impacts such as reclamation of wetlands, increasing pollution and illegal hunting as well as expanding urban sprawl are factors behind the reported population declines. Asia continues to be the continent of

most concern; 62% of waterbird populations were found to be decreasing or have become extinct.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2007), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/01/waterbird_declines.html

Europe

Knots in decline as food webs unravel

Many marine protected areas permit some exploitation of their resources, but the complex food webs in these areas cannot always sustain this. One quarter of Europe's red knots have starved since 1998 because their refuelling grounds, Europe's supposedly protected intertidal mudflats, have been affected by cockle fishing in the Netherlands' Wadden Sea. Until 2004 24 cockle boats were allowed to dredge the Wadden Sea, despite only small economic benefits. The dredging made the mud coarser, and thus less suitable for cockles, with the result that their meat-to-shell ratio fell by 11% per year for 5 years. The thinner cockles could not sustain the red knots, whose population fell by 80%, enough to account for the decrease in the European population as a whole. Two years after dredging stopped the mud remains coarse and the cockles have failed to recover.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2578), 7.

EU decision to ban permanently the wild bird trade

The EU Commission has announced that the ban on imports of birds caught in the wild is to be made permanent throughout the European Union from 1 July 2007. The move comes after a temporary ban was imposed within the EU in October 2005 when birds in a UK quarantine centre were found to have avian influenza. A number of conservation organizations have hailed the ban, noting that many bird species continue to be threatened by trade. However, the Secretariat of CITES has expressed disappointment, noting that the ban risks casting the impression that the international bird trade is not effectively controlled, whereas in fact it is regulated by the 169 member countries of CITES. The Secretariat noted that by ending legal and managed imports, the EU risks driving the market underground and making it less transparent, and also risks

undermining the impoverished communities who depend on the environmentally sustainable trade in birds and removing economic incentives for protecting bird habitat. (See also *Oryx*, 40, 18–28 & 261–265).

Source: *BirdLife News* (2007), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/01/eu_trade_ban.html; *CITES press release* (11 January 2007), http://www.cites.org/eng/news/press/2007/070111_EU_bird_ban.shtml

Bumble bees at risk from invaders...

Foreign bumble bees, imported to pollinate plants in commercial greenhouses, may pose a threat to native British bumble bees if they escape. Non-native bumble bee species have already proved capable of escaping from greenhouses and breeding in both Chile and Japan, and a study has found that non-native bumble bees would be able to survive in the British countryside. Additionally, there is a risk that non-native bumble bee species would outcompete British species, as their colonies are better at foraging for nectar, their individuals are larger and they produce more queens per colony than British species. (See also pp. 79–88).

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2560), 4.

... but impress with their navigational skills

Researchers at Newcastle University have found that bumble bees are capable of flying far further while foraging than the 5 km previously thought to be their limit. The bees were tagged with tiny body-hugging ribbons and released at different sites, while a webcam pointed at the nest to record which of the bees returned. Bees released at 4 pm one day were seen in the nest at 9 am the following morning, having navigated nearly 13 km between the release site and the nest. It is hoped that this technique will be useful in identifying how sensitive different bumble bee species are to changes in their habitat.

Source: *The Guardian* (2006), <http://environment.guardian.co.uk/conservation/story/0,,1846533,00.html>

Saltmarsh recreation project given the go-ahead

A project in the Camel Estuary in the south-west of England has been granted GBP 100,000 by the UK Government to breach existing sea defences with the aim of creating new areas of saltmarsh.

With the arrival of the spring tides the 15 ha plot of reclaimed farmland will be inundated with seawater through a series of pipes and a system of intertidal creeks. It is hoped that, once completed, the new saltmarsh will provide a habitat for numerous wading birds and fish.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2006), 52, 1123.

Bluefin tuna disappearing from Mediterranean

There is increasing concern about the long-term persistence of bluefin tuna stocks in some of the oldest fishing grounds in the Mediterranean, the traditional spawning ground of the fish. Catches of bluefin tuna have decreased dramatically over the past few years, with much of the tuna caught in the Mediterranean being supplied to Japan for use in sushi. A report by WWF presents evidence of large quantities of bluefin tuna being fished illegally in the Mediterranean, and in some cases being smuggled out of the area. In addition, there is a growing trend towards tuna farming, which places yet more pressure on wild fish stocks. WWF has called for the immediate and complete closure of this fishery until a long-term action plan can be agreed on.

Source: WWF (2006) *The Plunder of Bluefin Tuna in the Mediterranean and East Atlantic in 2004 and 2005: Uncovering the Real Story* (http://assets.panda.org/downloads/wwfbftreportfinalaeditionreducido_final.pdf)

UK failing its overseas territories

According to researchers working in the UK's overseas territories, the UK is not protecting these areas adequately, with the result that their biodiversity is at risk. The UK has more threatened wildlife on its overseas islands than in the whole of Europe, yet the government only spends c. GBP 1 million per year on these places, a paltry sum when compared to the GBP 500 million spent annually on protecting biodiversity in the UK. The lack of spending on conservation in the overseas territories has myriad effects. One recently discovered threat to wildlife on a UK overseas territory, Gough Island in the South Atlantic, is the eating of thousands of seabird chicks, including those of the Endangered Tristan albatross and Atlantic petrel, by invasive house mice. Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2574), 10.

Norway loses its taste for whale meat

Despite Norway being the only country to have resumed commercial whaling, in 1993, it appears that demand for whale meat is falling in the country. A short time before the end of the 2006 whale hunting season in Norway fishermen had caught fewer than half of the 1,052 whales allowed by their quota. Bad weather and high fuel prices are blamed by the Norwegian government for the small catch size, but environmentalists claim that whale meat, only consumed by small populations living in the high latitudes of the country, is less in demand now and that the industry should no longer be supported.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2566), 7.

Starving guillemots may be portent of major crisis

Hundreds of dead or starving young seabirds have been reported in Scotland and Northern Ireland, fuelling speculation that these are the outward signs of a much larger problem affecting coastal ecosystems. As most of the birds were guillemots, capable of diving to depths of over 90 m to catch their sandeel prey, the shortage of seabird food around the UK may be serious. Some birds were found as far inland as the centre of Glasgow, while others were found swimming up small streams in an apparent attempt to find food. It is feared that shifts in the distribution of plankton because of changes in climate may be to blame for the disintegration of the food chain.

Source: *RSPB press release* (18 September 2006), <http://www.rspb.org.uk/action/guillemots.asp>

North Eurasia

Water levels in Kyrgyzstan's largest lake on the rise

Lake Issykku, one of the largest natural water reservoirs, is generating debate among researchers trying to explain why its water levels are rising for the first time for 150 years. The lake's water levels have risen by c. 12 cm a year since 1999, submerging sandy beaches and washing plants from the shore. The causes of the water level rise are not yet clear. Some believe that melting glaciers in the mountains around the lake are to blame but others point out that water level fluctuation in Lake

Issykku is normal, and that the level depends on rainfall, water evaporation and shifts in tectonic plates that alter the shape of the lake bed.

Source: *Environmental News Service* (2006), <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/aug2006/2006-08-07-03.asp>

North Africa and Middle East

Cloud-catching scheme provides glimmer of hope for new forests

With virtually no rainfall occurring on the Canary Islands, the islands' forests depend on fog from the Atlantic Ocean. Attempts to replant the bare hills of northern Lanzarote (a Biosphere Reserve) have failed because the hillsides are too hot for the fog to settle on the ground. Instead, the fog stays c. 1 m above ground, beyond the reach of saplings. In 2005, a pilot fog-collecting project got underway using a device consisting of a metal frame supporting a plastic mesh, on which water condenses and runs down into a plastic bottle. The results were positive, with 1 m² of mesh sufficient to collect 2 l of water per day, more than enough for a seedling. Plans are now in place to install eight much larger nets of 12 m² each to collect c. 200 l of water a day, which will feed into an irrigation system for native tree saplings planted on the hillsides.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2563), 37–39.

Bombing of Lebanon results in oil slick

The bombing of Lebanon by Israel during July 2006 has had an effect on the wildlife of the area. In mid July the Jiyeh power plant was bombed, resulting in the release of 15,000 t of fuel oil into the waters around the Lebanese coast. The resulting oil slick spread 150 km northwards and reached the coast of Syria. An investigation of the Lebanese coast revealed the presence of toxic chemicals such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons that can build up in animal tissue, and can cause the collapse of fish stocks. The clean up operation will be hampered by the presence of the oil on pebble beaches, which are difficult to clean.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2567), 5.

Conservation charity organizes aid to villages in Lebanon

The Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), established during the Lebanese Civil War, has been instrumental in protecting one of the country's Important Bird Areas (IBA) during the Israel-Lebanon conflict of 2006. The Society orchestrated the delivery of aid to villages around the Kfar Zabad IBA, which accommodated c. 120 displaced families during the conflict, and where the SPNL has initiated a revival of the *hima* system, a traditional way of conserving water, grazing lands and other natural resources. The provision of aid sought to prevent additional pressure of a larger population on the Kfar Zabad marshlands.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/09/kfar_zabad.html

Marshes recovering

The Mesopotamian marshes in southern Iraq are recovering rapidly following their drainage during the reign of Saddam Hussein. Thirty-nine percent of the marshlands have become flooded again, and many wetland plants and animals have repopulated the marshes. Iraqi researchers have been performing monthly surveys since 2004. The success of the marshlands' reclamation is due in part to the good quality and quantity of water flowing down the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, the result of several years of high snowmelt in the mountains of Turkey and Iran. However, researchers warn that measures are still needed to safeguard the supply of water to southern Iraq.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2568), 7.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Greening the desert

Tree-planting in the Sahel region has converted the wastelands of this area into farmland, as revealed by satellite photos of the same area in 1986 and 2006. Poor management and felling of trees for firewood caused the land in the Sahel to become barren, but since the mid 1980s farmers have been protecting the trees, with the result that 250,000 ha of land have become available for farming once more. In areas where there were barely any trees at all in the 1980s there are now between 50–100 per ha, with the result that cereal production

has increased by 20–85% since 1984. Trees provide myriad benefits, such as preventing soil erosion and providing shade and fodder for livestock, which in turn produce manure that enriches the soil.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2573), 11.

Penguins in prefabs

Up to 2,000 fibreglass houses are being created for Vulnerable African penguins on Dyer Island, South Africa. Penguin accommodation is at a premium on this island, because guano collection in the past deprived the birds of their natural nesting substance of choice. Before the installation of the artificial houses penguins were forced to nest on the island's surface instead of in burrows, meaning that the adults needed to be constantly vigilant against attacks on their eggs and young by kelp gulls. The charity responsible for the installation of the penguin houses, the Dyer Island Conservation Trust, is looking for sponsors for the structures.

Source: *Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town* (2006), <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/dyerislandconstrust.htm>

West African black rhino feared extinct

A survey of the last strongholds of the West African black rhino in northern Cameroon has failed to find any trace of the subspecies, leading the African Rhino Specialist Group to speculate that it may now be extinct. Likewise, numbers of the northern white rhino have reached an all time low, with only four individuals located during a survey of the rhino's remaining habitat, Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In both cases, it is the continued poaching for rhino horn that is mainly to blame for the demise of these subspecies. There is some good news for other rhino subspecies, however, with populations of both the continental black rhino and the southern white rhino on the increase.

Source: *IUCN press release* (7 July 2006), http://www.iucn.org/en/news/archive/2006/07/7_pr_rhino.htm

Low-coverage vaccination helps Ethiopian wolf

The Endangered Ethiopian wolf, like many other threatened species, is vulnerable to being wiped out by disease. In the case of the Ethiopian wolf, rabies outbreaks spread by domestic dogs have

caused population crashes in the past. While it is possible to vaccinate Ethiopian wolves against rabies, conventional vaccination programmes generally require the vaccination of the majority of individuals, which can be impractical where threatened species are concerned. However, new research has found that, when dealing with small subpopulations such as those of the Ethiopian wolf in the Bale Mountains, a better approach may be to prevent the spread of the disease to other subpopulations through habitat corridors. This method, which aims to eliminate only the largest outbreaks of a disease, requires a lower rate of vaccination among populations and should enhance the long-term persistence of the population.

Source: *Nature* (2006), **443**(7112), 692–695.

Ebola transmitted within gorilla groups

Recent research has suggested that fruit bats might be responsible for the spreading of the Ebola virus, which has caused the deaths of one third of the world's lowland gorillas in the past 10 years. Researchers in the Republic of Congo's Odzala National Park, however, suspect that the gorillas are catching the disease from one another, because the death rate of gorillas in the Park is consistent with an epidemic model where group-living gorillas catch the disease from other group members, and also pass it on to solitary males. Further evidence comes from the fact that gorilla die offs lasted for 10 months every year, which is longer than the dry season during which gorillas encounter fruit bats. If apes are catching Ebola from one another vaccination may in time halt the spread of the disease.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), **191**(2560), 19.

FFI acts following killings of rare mountain gorillas

Two mountain gorillas, both solitary silverback males, have been killed in the Democratic Republic of Congo's Virunga National Park. Both were killed in January, and one is believed to have been eaten. It is feared that others may already have been killed or are in imminent danger. Before the attacks, it was thought that just 700 mountain gorillas were left in this region, with c. 150 in the Park. Dissident troops loyal to General Laurent Nkunda have recently been occupying the Park, and although

it has not been confirmed who killed the gorillas it is unlikely to have been local people, who do not eat gorillas and have been supportive of conservation work. Hippos and buffalos have also suffered from heavy poaching as a result of the insurgency. Staff from the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature, supported by UN mission (MONUC) troops, have been attempting to contact the dissident troops in the Park to stop any further damaging activities. MONUC have been in talks with General Nkunda that may bring an end to this crisis. FFI is appealing to all concerned to take immediate action to ensure that no more mountain gorillas are harmed, and to ensure that their forest habitat is safeguarded.

Source: FFI press release (18 January 2007), <http://www.fauna-flora.org>

Chimps look both ways when crossing the road

Chimpanzees have developed a protocol for crossing roads, and the strategy varies according to how dangerous the road is. In studies of chimps in Boussou, Guinea, it was found that adult males positioned themselves at the front and rear of the group as they crossed in single file, with females and juveniles in the better-protected centre of the group. The positions of the males varied according to the perceived risks of the road being negotiated; in some cases males stood guard over the rest of the group as it crossed.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), **191**(2569), 17.

Bushmeat markets thriving in the West

A study of illegal bushmeat markets in seven cities in North America and western Europe has found that over 6,000 kg of meat moves through these markets every month. Visits to bushmeat markets in London, Paris, Brussels, New York, Chicago, Montreal and Toronto found meat from a number of species, most commonly duikers, although in 27 cases gorilla and chimpanzee parts were found for sale. As bushmeat is often smuggled into the country beneath legal shipments such as dried or smoked fish it is difficult to estimate how much bushmeat is entering the countries, and the findings of this study are likely to underestimate the international trade.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), **191**(2559), 8.

Another new species recorded in Madagascar

A new species of shrew tenrec has been discovered. The Tenrecidae is a family of small mammals mostly endemic to Madagascar, and its latest member comes from the Tsaratanana Massif, the highest mountain system on the island and one of Madagascar's last zoologically unexplored areas of montane forest. The new shrew tenrec *Microgale jobihely*, named after two Malagasy words meaning dark (*joby*) and small (*hely*), appears to be the only member of the genus *Microgale* that is a localized endemic. *M. jobihely* is currently only known from a small area of forest located outside the protected areas system.

Source: *Journal of Zoology* (2006), **270**, 384–398.

Madagascar protects wetlands crucial for people and birds

One of Madagascar's most spectacular wildlife areas, almost 3,000 km² of tropical wetlands, forests, savannahs and caves, is to be protected by law. In January the Government of Madagascar granted the area protected status for 2 years, a preliminary step towards the area being granted permanent protection. Another wetland, Lake Alaotra in eastern Madagascar, was also granted similar protection. All of the wetland bird species of western Madagascar can be found in the Mahavavy-Kinkony wetlands, which are also a vital resource for fishing, hunting and agriculture. The wetlands are key habitats for Madagascar teal, Sakalava rail, Madagascar sacred ibis and Madagascar pond heron, and are also one of the last refuges for Madagascar fish eagle. The area's protection is part of President Marc Ravalomanana's 'Durban Vision', whereby Madagascar will increase its total protected areas to 6 million ha by 2008.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2007), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/01/madagascar_wetlands.html

Cuckooshrike strikes back

The control of predatory cats and rats on La Réunion is part of an action plan designed to protect the Endangered Réunion cuckooshrike, and is already having an effect. The removal of these invasive predators from a reserve on the northern part of the island led to four out of five pairs of cuckooshrike rearing chicks successfully, whereas a nearby area where cats and rats were not

controlled saw only two out of six pairs raising chicks successfully. Habitat loss and degradation, forest fires and predation by invasive species have reduced the Réunion cuckooshrike's population from 120 pairs in the 1990s to fewer than 50 pairs.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/09/reunion_cuckooshrike.html

Uganda designates nine new Ramsar sites

Uganda has added nine wetlands, ranging from the country's largest tract of swamp forest to a waterfall system and papyrus beds, to the List of Wetlands of National Importance designated under the Ramsar Convention. The country now has 11 Ramsar sites in total, covering 354,803 ha. One of the newly designated wetlands, Lake Opet, is home to Fox's weaver *Ploceus spekeoides*, the only bird species endemic to Uganda, while one of the other sites, Lutembe Bay, close to Uganda's capital city Kampala, is visited by up to 1.5 million migrant white-winged black terns.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/09/ugandan_ramsar.html

South and South-east Asia

Ultimate dolphin-friendly fishery protected

The government of Myanmar has established a protected area to safeguard a unique association between Critically Endangered Irrawaddy dolphins and fishermen on the Ayeyarwaddy River. The small, beakless dolphins are very skilful at herding fish into the fishermen's nets and can increase the size of the catch three-fold. Ironically, the dolphin has been brought to the brink of extinction by other river users through becoming trapped in nets, electrocuted by illegal electric fishing, poisoned by mercury and having its habitat altered by gold mining operations. The new protected area spans 70 km of the Ayeyarwaddy River, and will be patrolled regularly to enforce the prohibition on electric fishing and gold mining.

Source: *Wildlife Conservation Society* (2006), <http://www.wcs.org/353624/irrawaddydolphin>

Nepalese drug firm offers lifeline to beleaguered vultures

Medivet, Nepal's largest manufacturer of the drug diclofenac have been praised for its voluntary decision to replace the drug with a safe alternative, meloxicam, at the same price. India already plans to replace diclofenac, responsible for the deaths of millions of vultures on the Indian subcontinent over the last decade, with meloxicam and it is hoped that the move by Medivet will encourage the Nepalese government to follow suit.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 191(2564), 6.

World mourns conservation heroes

Twenty-four people died in a helicopter crash in eastern Nepal in September, among them a group of internationally-renowned Nepalese conservationists. The helicopter came down in bad weather while returning from an event in which the Nepalese government had handed control of the protected area surrounding Kangchenjunga, the world's third-highest mountain, to local community control. Among the Nepalis who perished in the disaster were Harka Gurung, one of the world's leading experts on the Himalayas, Tirtha Maskey, an expert on crocodiles and rhinoceroses, and Mingma Sherpa, the first person from his ethnic group, the *janajati*, to be the warden of the National Park that contains Everest. Also aboard the helicopter were seven foreigners, including the Finnish charge d'affaires, Pauli Mustonen, and four crew members.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/5379598.stm

Spectacular new bird species found in India

An Indian astronomer has identified a new bird species in Arunachal Pradesh, 10 years after he first spotted it in Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary. Returning with mist nets and permits, Ramana Athreya caught an adult of the new species, which has been named *Liocichla bugunorum* because most of the sightings have taken place in the community forest belonging to the Bugan tribe. The bird, a type of Asian babbler, is very colourful, with distinctive calls. The fact that previous surveys had failed to discover it mean its population is probably very small. Work has now commenced on developing an ecotourism project for Eaglenest, although the area where most sightings of the new species

have taken place is threatened by plans to build a highway.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/09/bugun_liocichla.html

Biodiverse karsts at risk of disappearing

Formed millions of years ago, South-east Asia's limestone karsts are home to many unique and threatened species, including a blind, rock-climbing loach and many endemic snail species. Karsts have been understudied in the past, leading researchers to speculate that they may contain species yet to be discovered. While c. 13% of South-east Asia's karst area is protected, karsts in some countries, such as Cambodia and Myanmar, have minimal or no protection. A growing demand for limestone has caused an increase in limestone quarrying, with the result that some karsts in the Pahang and Sabah regions of Malaysia have been completely levelled by mining companies.

Source: *National Geographic News* (2006), http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/09/060912-stone-karst_2.html

Earthquake appeal aids recovery in Palas Valley

A year after the massive earthquake in northern Pakistan funds raised by BirdLife International have helped to repair a bridleway into a remote mountain valley where 79 people died in the quake. The restoration of the bridleway means that people living in the Upper Palas Valley have improved access to the main road, allowing them to transport their agricultural and other produce from the valley to market and to move their livestock to and from their summer pastures, as well as granting relief agencies better access to the valley for their reconstruction work. The cost of the repair was USD 15,000, but estimates suggest that USD 220,000 will be required to repair all the essential infrastructure in the valley.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/10/palas_bridleway.html

East Asia

Paddies could help mitigate China's greenhouse gas emissions

A new soil map of China has prompted researchers to revise their calculations of

the land area taken up by rice paddies from 30 to 45.7 million ha. Additional research has found that the mean density of carbon stored in the top metre of paddy soil is higher than originally thought. As a result, it is estimated that Chinese rice paddies store 5.1 billion t of carbon, leading to the suggestion that the Chinese government could look for ways to sequester carbon emissions in its soils as a means of mitigating the atmospheric increases of greenhouse gases produced by the country's expanding economy.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2573), 16.

China considering tiger farms

A think tank in India has suggested that the use of tiger farms could be used to benefit tigers in the wild by supplying tiger parts to the international market, thus making it uneconomic to hunt tigers in the wild and raising revenue for tiger conservation. China has 4,000 tigers being reared in a few farms, but the current law prohibits the killing of tigers, so the farmers have to wait until the animals die of natural causes before they can sell their parts. Conservationists are concerned, however, that opening up the trade in tiger parts will make it harder to track illegally obtained tiger parts, and they also suspect that tigers will still be hunted as wild tiger parts are more valuable than their farmed equivalent.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2578), 16–17.

Mongolian saiga to be tracked

The Wildlife Conservation Society have caught eight Endangered Mongolian saiga in the Gobi desert and fitted them with global positioning satellites to try and learn more about this rare antelope. The saiga's population has fallen from c. 1 million to only 30,000, with fragmented populations occurring in parts of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kalmykia, and Kazakhstan as well as Mongolia. The main cause of the species' demise has been hunting; saiga horns can fetch more than USD 100 per kg in China. The information gained from the collared saiga in Mongolia will help researchers devise an effective strategy for their conservation. (See also *Oryx*, 38, 250–251; 39, 372–373; 40, 103–107).

Source: *Environmental News Service* (2006), <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/oct2006/2006-10-20-01.asp>

North America

Buffalo to roam the prairies again

Bison, once the dominant species of the American west, look set to make a comeback. While there are still c. 350,000 bison on the prairies, these are mostly the result of interbreeding between cattle and bison. Now a conservation land trust, the American Prairie Foundation, has released 20 pure-bred bison onto its land in Montana, and it is hoped that, in 100 years time, bison will once again be integral to land management in the American west. Bison herds are beneficial to grassland ecosystems, with evidence of wildfires burning less hot in areas grazed by bison.

Source: *New Scientist* (2006), 192(2575), 16.

First 'elepaio nest found in Pōhakuloa

The Hawai'i 'elepaio *Chasiempis sandwichensis sandwichensis* is a subspecies endemic to the island of Hawai'i that occurs in the dry forests of south and west Hawai'i. While a population of the birds was known to occur in the US Army's Pōhakuloa Training Area, no nest had ever been observed. In 2006, however, two biologists came across an 'elepaio nest under construction in the area, and more recently the female has been observed incubating. The nest will be monitored closely, and a rodent control grid will be maintained throughout the breeding season to prevent predation of the nest by rats.

Source: *'elepaio* (2006), 66(7), 55.

Hawai'i urges blackout for birds

The Hawaiian island of Kauai is home to three nocturnal sea birds, the Hawaiian petrel, Newell's shearwater and the band-rumped storm-petrel, all of which navigate by moonlight. All three species are protected under the US Endangered Species Act, which, in a novel ruling, has asked that all nonessential lights are turned off on the island between 15 September and 15 December, the period when the easily confused young birds leave their nests for the sea. The island's electricity company is helping the campaign by darkening all of its 3,000 streetlights, some of which have been turned off entirely. The company has also installed large balls on its power lines to try and reduce the number of birds crashing into the cables.

Source: *National Geographic News* (2006), <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/09/060919-light-birds.html>

Translocated Laysan teal breed successfully

Laysan teal on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge had a successful breeding season in 2006, 2 years after a founder population of wild teal was moved from Laysan Island to Midway Atoll as an insurance policy for the population on Laysan Island. The population on Midway Atoll has doubled in the 2 years since its establishment, and birds now occur on, and fly between, two islands within the Midway Atoll. Monitoring of the populations on Laysan Island and Midway Atoll have revealed some interesting differences between the two populations, with the teal on Midway Atoll breeding at an earlier age and laying more eggs than those on Laysan, suggesting that food or habitat on the latter island may be limited.

Source: *US Geological Survey press release* (23 October 2006).

Wildlife suffers along USA-Mexico border

During the last 10 years or so security at major crossing points on the USA-Mexico border has been stepped up, with the result that migrants and drug-runners now cross the border in the Sonoran desert, home to the Endangered pronghorn antelope. Not only do the immigrants and drug-smugglers pose a risk to the rich biodiversity of the area, but it is not safe for researchers to work there; in 2002 a ranger was killed in the desert in a drug-related pursuit. Recent bills in the House and Senate propose hundreds of km of additional fencing along the border, which would prove hard for non-volant wildlife to cross. In some areas, however, alternatives to solid fences are being used; in the summer of 2006 the National Park Service funded the erection of a barrier consisting of a steel pipe one metre off the ground, which lets wildlife through but prevents access by cars.

Source: *Nature* (2006), 442(7101), 338–339.

Alpine plants flowering earlier because of climate change

A long-term investigation of pollination ecology in the Colorado Rocky Mountains has found that the timing of alpine flowering is becoming earlier and the abundance of some flower species has changed. The change in timing of flowering may have serious negative effects on both plants and their pollinators, particularly as evidence shows that plants and pollinators are responding

differently to climate change. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that climate change affects high altitudes in a different way than lower altitudes. Researchers fear that climate change will irrevocably disrupt the relationships between pollinators and plants that have co-evolved over thousands of years.

Source: *Earthwatch press release* (17 August 2006).

Florida reports ivory-billed woodpecker sightings

Following the claims that the ivory-billed woodpecker was spotted in Arkansas in 2005, researchers have now tracked the woodpecker down to the Choctawhatchee River in Florida. Between May 2005 and May 2006 there were 14 sightings of the bird in the forests along the river. In addition, the researchers also heard sounds that matched those recorded for the ivory-billed woodpecker. Before the current spate of sightings of the woodpecker the last fully documented sighting in the USA was in Louisiana in 1944, and many had speculated that the bird had become extinct.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/09/florida_ivory.html

Alaskan wetlands given reprieve - for the moment

One of the most important habitats in the Arctic has been handed a lifeline by a federal judge in the face of the Bush administration's plan to open the area to oil drilling. The US Interior Department estimates that the area around Teshekpuk Lake in Alaska contains c. 1.4 billion barrels of oil, but it is also the summer home of most of North America's duck and geese and a calving ground for caribou. The Interior Department had planned to sell leases covering more than 8 million acres of Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve, but the US District Judge ruled that the federal government's analysis of the environmental impacts of drilling in the Reserve was flawed.

Source: *Environmental News Service* (2006), <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/sep2006/2006-09-08-01.asp>

Hope for Socorro dove

The Socorro dove, native to the one of the Revillagigedo Islands 600 miles off the coast of Mexico, died out in the 1970s after being hunted for food, having its forest floor habitat destroyed by sheep and being eaten by feral cats. Since its

extinction in the wild the species has been kept in captivity, but it is estimated that fewer than 100 individuals remain. Now a Socorro dove has been bred successfully at London Zoo, fuelling hopes that this will mark a reversal in the fortunes of the species. Conservationists hope that Arnie, named by his keepers after Arnold Schwarzenegger, will be part of a captive breeding programme that will culminate in reintroduction to the forests of Socorro Island.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/6097346.stm>

Central America and Caribbean

Critically Endangered lizards hatch eggs

Three eggs laid by blue iguanas in a Nature Reserve on Grand Cayman Island have hatched. The main threat faced by the reptiles is rapid habitat destruction. During 1993–2002 the amount of land they occupied decreased by half, with the result that their population fell by 80%. The Blue Iguana Recovery Programme was initiated in 1990, and has released 219 captive-bred iguanas into Salina Nature Reserve since 2004. The unmanaged population of blue iguanas is likely to be extinct within the next 10 years.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/6083816.stm>

South America

Brazil approves deforestation of important Amazon reserve

The State Government of Mato Grosso, Brazil, has voted to reduce drastically one of the Amazon's most biodiverse reserves, Cristalino State Park, which is a world-renowned ecotourism destination that is home to over 550 species of bird and protects threatened species such as the white-whiskered spider monkey. Twenty-seven thousand ha of its forest will now be unprotected and vulnerable to logging, cattle ranching and agribusiness. The State Government is also set to seize a private reserve on the southern border of the park, although it lacks the funds necessary to manage it. This would supposedly

compensate for the deforestation within Cristalino State Park, but would also conveniently remove groups that oppose the State Government's plans. The private reserve was established by Cristalino Lodge (a successful ecotourism business) and the Cristalino Ecological Foundation (a local environmental NGO), with the assistance of Fauna & Flora International. Individuals closely connected to the State Government are known to have private interests in lands within the Park. Mato Grosso has suffered the highest rate of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon.

Source: *FFI press release* (11 January 2007), <http://www.fauna-flora.org>

Brazilian soy farmers agree to 2-year moratorium on forest clearance

An initiative led by the Brazilian Association of Vegetable Oil Producers and the Brazilian National Grains Exporters' Association has resulted in Brazil's major soy traders agreeing to a 2-year moratorium on buying soybeans from areas in the Amazon deforested after July 24 2006. The agreement comes as a result of increased public awareness and NGO pressure about the links between fast-food and deforestation resulting from the expansion of soy farming. Soy farming is held responsible for much of the current deforestation in the Amazon, and is also blamed for soil degradation and water pollution.

Source: *Arborvitae* (2006), 31, 2.

Two new species of Brazilian reptile

Two new species of lizard have been described from Brazil: *Stenocercus squarrosus* and *Stenocercus quinarius*. The reptiles were found in regions of cerrado and caatinga. The habitat of *S. quinarius* is the Sertão Veredas National Park between Minas Gerais and Bahia. *S. squarrosus* was found in the Serra das Confusões National Park, southern Piauí. The two new species live on tree trunks and in tree holes, where they are very well camouflaged.

Source: *Conservation International press release* (24 January 2007).

Illegal hunting hampers huemul conservation

Poachers have deliberately killed a huemul in a captive breeding centre established specifically for reintroductions. In late October a pregnant female huemul was shot and killed inside a 64 ha enclosure established at Huilo-Huilo in

the Lake District, Chile. The deer had been shot through the chest and then abandoned, suggesting that it had been killed deliberately. The motive remains unclear. The centre held four huemul, brought there in 2005 to start the process of reintroducing the species to the northern range of the Lake District. Huemul were last seen in this region approximately 20 years ago. This killing follows previous cases earlier in the year when two radio-collared huemul and a fawn were killed in separate incidents in Tamango Reserve in Region XI, Chile. The loss of these animals, all in protected areas, indicates the scale of illegal hunting and the difficulties facing conservation efforts for the species.

Source: IUCN (2006), http://www.iun.com/EIDia/detalle_noticia.asp?cuerpo=701&seccion=801&subseccion=901&id-noticia=CD9H5SQ520061101

Pinta to feel the patter of tortoise feet once more

The island of Pinta in the Galapagos archipelago is to be repopulated by tortoises, 35 years after the last individual of Pinta's endemic subspecies of tortoise, Lonesome George, was taken into captivity. The 100 tortoises to be released on Pinta originate from another island in the Galapagos archipelago, Española, and are not of the same subspecies as Lonesome George, making this the first time that a conservation project in the Galapagos islands has used taxon substitution. It is hoped that the introduction of the Española subspecies to Pinta will help restore the island's ecological balance and also maintain numbers of the Española subspecies, which dropped to a low of 15 individuals at one time, but now numbers in the thousands.

Source: *Nature* (2006), 443(7113), 737.

Brazilian ranchers to be forced to reforest their land

The government of Acre state in the west of Brazil has started a nursery of native seedlings outside the capital, Rio Branco, which are to be issued to ranchers to try and halt the deforestation of this part of the Amazon. The government has a long-term aim to develop sustainable forestry as a key income generator for the state, and to this end ranchers may be made to reforest up to 30% of their land. Although Acre is only 11% deforested, much of the destruction is focused around the capital, with some municipalities affected more than others. In some cases heavily deforested areas

are already experiencing a decrease in the available water supply.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/5361840.stm>

Speed camera to save tapirs

In January the Transportation Department of São Paulo State, Brazil, installed a speed radar on the highway that crosses Morro do Diabo State Park, which is an important area for tapirs and is the stronghold for the black lion tamarin *Leontopithecus chrysopygus*. The speed limit on the road of 70 km per hour is to ensure that drivers have enough time to see any animals crossing the road. A number of tapirs are killed by cars on this road each year. In the first weekend 90 cars were found speeding, and as the tickets are expensive (BRL 450, or GBP 110) it is believed the fine will be a major deterrent and will help prevent animal deaths on the road.

Source: [Http://www.tapirspecialistgroup.org](http://www.tapirspecialistgroup.org)

New coffee helps rare songbird

In January the American Bird Conservancy announced that Cerulean Warbler Conservation Coffee is now available for sale. This is shade grown coffee from plantations in Central Colombia that the cerulean warbler, a declining songbird that nests in North America, depends on during the winter. Proceeds from the coffee sales will be used to maintain the shade plantations and an adjacent cerulean warbler forest reserve. Shade grown coffee plantations are at risk of being converted to sun coffee and other cash crops, resulting in a loss of forest cover and bird habitat. The loss of these plantations is cited as a reason for the bird's decline. The American Bird Conservancy teamed up with its Colombian partner, Fundacion ProAves, local growers' cooperative COOPERAN, American Birding Association, and the Thanksgiving Coffee Company to bring this organic coffee to market.

Source: [Http://www.abcbirds.org](http://www.abcbirds.org)

Pacific

British Birdwatching Fair supports Pacific parrots

The British Birdwatching Fair has raised GBP 215,000 for the conservation of parrots in the Pacific, many of which are facing considerable threats. The annual 3-day fair is held at Rutland Water and is jointly promoted by the

RSPB and Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. Almost 19,000 people attended the event in August 2006. The donation from the Fair will contribute towards BirdLife's work in the Pacific Islands. Pacific parrots are becoming extinct at a higher rate than anywhere else in the world, mainly due to invasive alien species such as cats and black rats. The donation will help BirdLife strengthen and raise capacity of BirdLife partners in the Pacific, providing a basis to halt parrot declines and protecting habitats through the Important Bird Areas Programme.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2007), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/01/british_birdfair_cheq_presentation.html

Australia/Antarctica/New Zealand

'Fred the Thread' wriggles his way into the record books

Three years after finding the world's thinnest caterpillar, nick-named Fred the Thread, researchers have finally identified its adult form, a previously unknown genus of moth. The moth has been given the name *Houdinia flexilis-sima*, because the adult moth must perform a Houdini-esque escape to leave the narrow stem in which the caterpillar pupates. The future of the newly discovered species is bleak however, as the caterpillar lives exclusively within the stems of a threatened rush-like plant *Sporadanthus ferrugineus*, only found at three wetland sites in Waikato, New Zealand.

Source: *Landcare Research press release* (19 October 2006), http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/news/release.asp?Ne_ID=209

River gets protection

South Canterbury's Rangitata River is now protected by a Water Conservation Order, which identifies areas of the river that are to be retained in their natural state. It prohibits the building of new dams, limits activities that may alter the river's flow and braided character, and protects water quality and fish passage. The Rangitata River provides large areas of unmodified habitat for aquatic birds, and is probably the most important breeding ground of the Vulnerable wrybill, the only bird species with a bill that curves to the right. Without protection it was feared that the smaller braids along the river would dry up as a

result of water extraction, reducing the feeding area for aquatic birds and removing the protective moat around their nests.

Source: *Forest & Bird* (2006), 321, 11.

Lungfish's future slithering away

The Australian lungfish, which has survived virtually unchanged for 100 million years, is confined to two river systems in Queensland, a drought-stricken area of Australia with the country's fastest growing population. One of these two rivers, the Burnett, was dammed in 2005, and there are now plans to dam the second river, the Mary. Because the lungfish is protected, the dam project needs to pass a federal environmental impact assessment before it is approved. Despite the Queensland government's assurances that the lungfish will be taken into account in the plans, to the extent of building a 'fish elevator' to carry lungfish across the dam, biologists fear that the fish's future is not secure, as the dam will destroy its traditional spawning grounds.

Source: *Nature* (2006), 442(7100), 232–233.

Australians face snake invasion

A serious drought is driving tens of thousands of snakes into urban areas in Australia, with many venomous reptiles moving into residential and business areas in search of moisture. Many parts of Australia have been hard hit by the worst drought in 100 years. Hospitals have reported a rising

number of snakebites and toxicologists have treated 60 serious cases since September. The drought is making snakes far more active. However, conservationists have insisted that many snakes have been unnecessarily killed by worried residents.

Source: *BBC News* (2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6282075.stm>

South Georgia's fishing industry gains certification

The long-line fishery for Patagonian toothfish in South Georgia has been certified as a sustainable and well-managed fishery by the Marine Stewardship Council. All the boats in the fishery use mitigation measures developed by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources to reduce seabird catch. The measures have been instrumental in reducing the number of accidental albatross deaths from several thousand each year to single figures. The toothfish is still threatened by illegal fishing and overfishing in other fisheries, but the certification means that consumers can now opt to buy toothfish from the sustainable South Georgian fishery.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), <http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/09/toothfish.html>

Greens threaten legal action to ensure grey sharks' protection

Despite being protected since 1984, grey nurse shark numbers off the east coast of Australia continue to fall, with the finger

of blame being pointed at fishermen who catch them accidentally. Conservationists are worried that the future of the species in Australian waters is at risk, with only 500 individuals estimated to remain in this area, and accuse the New South Wales state government of pandering to the recreational fishing lobby by not doing enough to protect the species. Campaigners are calling for a 1.5 km wide sanctuary zone around 16 critical grey shark aggregation sites that would include a complete ban on fishing. The state government, however, refutes claims that it is failing its legal obligations towards the protected shark, and accuses the green groups of exaggeration and scaremongering.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/5414410.stm>

The *Briefly* section in this issue was written and compiled by Elizabeth Allen and Martin Fisher, with additional contributions from Patricia Medici, Michelle Reynolds and Anthony Rylands. Contributions from authoritative published sources (including web sites) are always welcome. Please send contributions by e-mail to oryx@fauna-flora.org, or to Martin Fisher, Fauna & Flora International, Great Eastern House, Tenison Road, Cambridge, CB1 2TT, UK.