

## International

**Global tuna initiative is launched**

WWF and TRAFFIC have launched a Global Tuna Conservation Initiative, which aims to protect the world's tuna species by addressing both conservation issues and trade. In 2002 world tuna production reached 4 million tonnes and accounted for 9% of the world's export value of fish products. Overall, the industry generated in excess of US \$3 billion in 2003 and there are indications that global demand for tuna will continue to rise. This demand is threatening tuna populations. Of 23 tuna stocks identified globally, five are already overexploited while 11 are fully exploited. Tuna conservation will be addressed through four areas of work around tuna fisheries, the impact on ecosystems, the effective management of tuna fisheries, the adoption of guidelines and agreements to support the sustainable exploitation of tuna, and the encouragement of the sustainable management of tuna.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(7–8), 530.

**Debate over response of coral reefs to global warming**

Scientists are arguing over the likely impact of global warming and rising sea temperatures on coral reefs. One team of scientists in Australia has argued that the damage done by increasing CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the oceans will be offset by warmer waters, which will make corals grow faster. However, others argue that the negative effects of global warming will outweigh the positive effects. Increasing levels of dissolved CO<sub>2</sub> reduce the levels of calcium and carbonate ions in seawater, which are needed to make corals. However, the Australian researchers have argued that warmer water increases the rate of calcification and have predicted that by 2100 coral would be growing 35% faster than today. But another detrimental effect of rising sea temperatures may be the death of symbiotic algae that live in the coral, causing so-called bleaching. The debate is set to continue.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2477), 12.

**Kyoto Protocol likely to come into force in 2005**

The Kyoto Protocol on climate change was agreed 7 years ago and it is now expected to finally come into force in early 2005 following the Russian parliament's ratification in October 2004. The involvement of Russia has been crucial because the treaty could only come into force if ratified by industrialized nations who together were producing 55% of the world's greenhouse gases in 1990. The pressure is now being put on Australia and the US to ratify the treaty but the US, the world's largest producer of greenhouse gases, shows no sign of being prepared to sign up.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2471), 7.

**Inbreeding may increase risk of infections in threatened species**

A new study has suggested that inbreeding in panthers, cheetahs and other threatened species may put animals at increased risk of parasites and infections that could drive the remaining populations to extinction. Inbreeding increases the risk of certain genetic diseases and may also weaken the immune system, making animals more susceptible to illness. For example, there are fewer than 100 Florida panthers in the wild and these animals are unusually prone to infections. In the 1980s an outbreak of feline infectious peritonitis killed more than half of an extremely inbred cheetah population. However, scientists debate whether the results of this new study, conducted on fruit flies, can really be applied to species such as cheetahs. Despite these disagreements it is recognized that more should be done to limit the increasing number of diseases introduced by international trade and travel to previously untouched populations of threatened species.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2471), 16–17.

**Rare cats may be cloned**

Conservationists are trying to clone the black-footed cat *Felis nigripes*, a small and elusive species found in southern Africa. The rusty spotted cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* from India and Sri Lanka is also on the list for possible cloning. The Audubon Center for Research on Endangered Species believes that cloning could help save threatened species. They have already successfully cloned African wild cats *Felis lybica* using domestic cats as surrogate mothers. So far, experiments with black-footed cats have been unsuccessful, possibly

because the species is too distantly related to the domestic cat for inter-species cloning to work. In 2005 researchers will try and clone rusty spotted cats using frozen cells from an animal that died in a US zoo. There are only 13 rusty spotted cats in captivity, and in the wild the species is threatened by hybridization with domestic cats.

Source: *New Scientist* (2005), 185(2481), 12.

**Most of captive Spix's macaws now owned by one man**

Spix's macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* was declared extinct in the wild in 2000 when the last known individual disappeared. However, the number of birds known to be in captivity has been climbing. Sheikh Saud Al Thani now owns more than three quarters of the captive population. Following the purchase of birds from breeders in Switzerland and the Philippines, Al Thani now has 42 birds at the Al Wabra Wildlife Preservation facility in Qatar, where he successfully bred birds in 2004. The concentration of birds in one facility may increase their chances of survival, although conservationists are concerned that so many birds are in one man's hands. The Brazilian Government owns the other 12 birds held in captivity, and any reintroduction would need their support. However, there are no current plans to reintroduce Spix's macaw into the wild.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(11), 30.

**First global amphibian survey paints bleak picture**

Amphibians are under far greater threat than birds or mammals according to the results of the first worldwide survey. Almost a third of the 5,743 known species of amphibians are threatened and 427 species (7%) are classed as Critically Endangered. The reasons for the declines are largely unknown and in almost 30% of species there are not enough data to discern population trends. Amphibians tend to have smaller ranges and are less tolerant of environmental change than birds or mammals, making them more vulnerable to habitat loss and overhunting. It is thought that the fungal disease chytridiomycosis may be responsible for severe declines but the fungus was present well over 10 years before declines began. The fungus itself can be controlled in captive frogs but not apparently in wild populations.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2470), 8.

### **Kits for customs officers monitoring bear trade**

The World Society for the Protection of Animals is to provide kits to customs officers to help them tackle the illegal trade in bear parts. Despite being prohibited by CITES, bear bile and gall bladders are traded illegally as they are popular ingredients in traditional medicines. Gall bladders can fetch up to 18 times their weight in gold. Bear poaching and farming are rife in areas such as China, Korea and Vietnam. The kits work on the same principle as home pregnancy kits, which use antibodies to detect specific proteins. In this case the kit's detector reacts with seven proteins specific to each bear species apart from pandas, in which there is little trade.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2476), 16.

### **The seas are far noisier than previously**

The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society have launched a new report, *Oceans of Noise*, which highlights the threats from increasing levels of noise in the ocean environment. There are many sources of noise pollution, including vessel traffic, oil and gas exploration, seismic surveys, ocean experiments, military sources, acoustic harassment devices, dredging and marine wind farms. The impact of increased noise on marine animals is well documented and it has been suggested the abilities of the great whales to communicate with each across entire ocean basins has been dramatically reduced. Cetaceans rely heavily on sound as a form of communication and a way of finding food. Adding alien and often powerful sounds to this environment is akin to adding blinding and confusing lights to the terrestrial environment.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(11–12), 886.

### **New tool for tracking biodiversity loss**

Most of the world's nations are committed to reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010 but it has until now been difficult to measure changes in the status of biodiversity and thus impossible to assess if progress is being made. A new tool should help in this regard. The Red List Index measures trends in overall extinction risk for complete classes of organisms starting with the best known group, the 10,000 bird species. The Red List Index is based on information in the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* and uses objective, standardized criteria to measure extinction risk. Each category

of threatened species is assigned criteria and the Red List Index shows trends based on movements of species between the Red List categories. The status of birds has been assessed for the Red List four times since 1988 and the Red List Index picked up a serious deterioration in the extinction risk of the world's birds in that time. In particular, there is a rapid deterioration in status of birds in South-east Asia as a result of deforestation of the Indonesian lowlands, and a collapse of albatross and petrel populations because of longline fishing.

Source: [Http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/10/red\\_list\\_indices.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/10/red_list_indices.html)

### **Great white sharks protected by CITES**

At the 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to CITES held in Bangkok in October 2004, participants agreed to adopt a proposal to list the great white shark *Carcharodon carcharias* on Appendix II of the convention. The proposal was prepared by Madagascar and Australia and the listing will allow better management of the species, which is threatened by trade in its jaws, teeth and fins. Great white sharks are particularly targeted by game fishermen, and their fins are highly sought after for the Asian market where they are used to make shark fin soup. There are currently no precise figures on regional or worldwide populations of great whites. Only two other shark species are listed on CITES, the basking shark and the whale shark, both filter-feeders that are at risk from overfishing.

Source: [Http://wcs.org/353624/5334098](http://wcs.org/353624/5334098)

### **Danger zones identified for threatened seabirds**

A new study by BirdLife International, *Tracking Ocean Wanderers*, is a collation of satellite tracking data for 16 species of albatrosses and three petrel species, all of them threatened by commercial and pirate longline fishing. The report highlights areas where longline fleets are putting seabirds at most risk. Hotspots where there are concentrations of both seabirds and longliners include the waters around New Zealand and south-east Australia, the south-west Indian Ocean, South Atlantic and North Pacific. More than 300,000 seabirds, including 100,000 albatrosses, die as bycatch from longline fleets every year. The report also stresses the importance of coastal shelf areas for albatrosses and petrels while breeding, and of highly productive oceanic regions such as the Humboldt Current and the Patagonian Shelf.

Source: [Http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/11/ocean\\_wanderers.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/11/ocean_wanderers.html)

### **First international ban on finning is adopted**

Conservation groups celebrated the first international ban on shark finning that was adopted by the International Commission on the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) in January 2005. The proposal to ban finning and enhance information about sharks in ICCAT fisheries was co-sponsored by the USA, the European Community, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Panama, South Africa, Trinidad & Tobago, and Venezuela. Finning has been banned in the US Atlantic since 1993 and other ICCAT member countries have domestic bans. The success of the ICCAT shark measures will hinge on enforcement of the finning ban, careful monitoring of new shark data, and follow-up action through catch limits.

Source: [Http://www.wcs.org/353624/6240831](http://www.wcs.org/353624/6240831)

## **Europe**

### **EU proposes protection for coral reefs**

The European Commission has proposed measures to protect deep sea corals around the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands until long-term rules can be established. The deep waters around these islands host coral aggregations, thermal vents and carbonate mounds, features that are rare in European waters and that are susceptible to intensive fishing practices such as bottom trawling. These habitats have been protected under the Common Fisheries Policy, but in November 2003 the Council of European Fisheries Ministers agreed that the EU's fishing fleet could access Azorean waters between 100 and 200 nautical miles, without first agreeing limits on their activity and fishing gear. Bottom trawling, which had previously been prohibited under the policy, was allowed.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(7–8), 527.

### **Drift nets could lead to extinction of species in Mediterranean**

Fishing boats using illegal drift nets could threaten the survival of dolphins, sharks and loggerhead turtles in the Mediterranean Sea. The first field survey of the fishery has shown that each year

drift nets that are used mainly to catch swordfish are also catching 15,000–19,000 dolphins and 82,000–107,000 sharks. Most of the boats are from Morocco and are fishing around the Alboran Sea and Strait of Gibraltar. The animal most threatened by the drift nets is the short-beaked common dolphin. According to the International Whaling Commission, taking any more than 2% of the dolphins annually would cause the population to decline; researchers estimate that currently more than 10% of the population are being taken each year.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2470), 18.

#### Number of birds in trouble in Europe is increasing

A new study by BirdLife International, *Birds in Europe*, shows that 226 species, 43% of those occurring regularly in Europe, are facing an uncertain future. Since the publication of the last study of European birds 10 years ago, 45 species have declined in numbers and now have an unfavourable conservation status. Many waders, particularly the northern lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, have declined largely because of drainage of lowland river valleys and upland habitat. Even familiar urban birds such as the house sparrow *Passer domesticus* and the common starling *Sturnus vulgaris* have suffered big declines. However, 14 bird species have seen their fortunes improve including Audouin's gull *Larus audouinii*, Eurasian griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus* and white-tailed eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*.

Source: [Http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/11/birds\\_in\\_europe.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/11/birds_in_europe.html)

#### EU Emissions Trading Scheme is criticized

On 1 January 2005 the EU Emissions Trading Scheme began, marking a key phase in the EU's implementation of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. However, the scheme has been criticized by conservationists who argue that individual countries have been allowed to give overgenerous allocations to industry at the expense of the environment. It is argued that the biggest polluters have been given a reprieve and will not be punished appropriately under a 'polluter pays' system. In the UK, for example, the government has increased emissions allowances for UK industry under the EU's carbon trading system and this will allow industry to emit an extra 19.8 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over the next 3 years.

Source: [Http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n\\_0000001422.asp](http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n_0000001422.asp)

#### Birds Directive celebrates its 25th anniversary

In 1979 the European Community marked its first significant commitment to nature conservation by approving the Birds Directive. Twenty-five years on, there is much to celebrate. Targeted conservation actions within the framework of this directive have significantly improved the status of Europe's most threatened bird species. The protection of key habitats, particularly wetlands, has been promoted by an impressive network of Special Protection Areas (SPAs). However, a number of member states have yet to complete implementation, particularly in the designation of SPAs, and the latest information on trends in bird populations in Europe show there are continuing declines, particularly amongst farmland birds.

Source: *Natura 2000* (2004), 18, 1.

#### Call for complete ban on imports of wild birds in Europe

More than 200 environmental groups are asking the EU to introduce a permanent ban on the import of wild birds. The EU temporarily banned importation of all birds, including processed poultry and wild birds, from nine Asian countries in January 2004 after outbreaks of avian flu in South-east Asia. That ban was due to expire in December 2004 but may be extended until 31 March 2005.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 432(7018), 661.

#### European Fisheries Ministers reject plans for closed areas and reduced quotas

For the second year running European Fisheries Ministers have rejected measures designed to safeguard dwindling fish stocks. At the December Fisheries Council in Brussels, Ministers again ignored scientific advice from International Exploration of the Seas (ICES) and sought to protect their own fishing industries. The European Commission had proposed to close off areas in the North Sea to fishing for a year but this was withdrawn at the last minute. Ministers also rejected ICES advice to reduce Total Allowable Catches and quotas for the most vulnerable deep sea stocks that are at risk of overfishing or are already at unsustainable levels of exploitation. Ministers did agree to decrease the number of days that fishermen are allowed to go to sea but it is thought that this will make little difference to heavily depleted cod stocks.

Source: [Http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n\\_0000001421.asp](http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n_0000001421.asp)

#### Egg collecting at an all time low in the UK

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has confirmed that there were only nine cases of egg collecting in the UK in 2003 compared to 46 in 2000. This success is thought to be largely due to new legislation. The Countryside and Public Rights of Way Act 2000 now allows courts to impose custodial sentences for egg collecting; previously only fines were imposed. However, there has been an increase in poisoning, with 16 red kites poisoned in 2003, the highest recorded in any one year.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(12), 31.

#### UK public woods among the most sustainably managed in the world

The Forestry Commission in the UK has been successfully re-audited against the UK Woodland Assurance Standard, confirming that the nation's public woods are being managed sustainably. This is the second international seal of approval for the UK's public woods making them among the most sustainable in the world. This means that consumers who buy a British woodland product that is stamped with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) logo can be assured that they are making a sustainable choice. Timber, signs, outdoor furniture and venison are among the FSC-certified goods produced by the Forestry Commission in Scotland, England and Wales.

Source: [Http://www.forestry.gov.uk/newsrele.nsf/AllByUNID/07B9A1757F6989DD80256F56005E9DE7](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/newsrele.nsf/AllByUNID/07B9A1757F6989DD80256F56005E9DE7)

#### England gets its first new national park in 15 years

The New Forest in southern England was designated a national park in June 2004, the first such designation in 15 years. Environmentalists argue that the new national park will help protect important habitats from intensive farming and development. Several nationally rare bird species are found in the New Forest, including the Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*, nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and woodlark *Lullula arborea*.

Source: *Arborvitae* (2004), 26, 4.

#### Ivory seized in London raids

Police in London have raided several shops, seizing ivory products with a street value in excess of £85,000. In all, 142 ivory items were seized with a value of £60,000, including a substantial

amount of unworked and partially worked ivory as well as 32 carved ivory items and 14 shaving bowls with tortoiseshell inlay, with an estimated street value of £25,000. In November 2003 new powers and penalties were approved under the Criminal Justice Act with the maximum sentence for wildlife trafficking being raised from 2 to 5 years and the police being given new powers of arrest for such crimes. However, this new legislation cannot be used because the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has failed to issue new regulations. The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee has recently called on Defra to act without delay in bringing the new law into force.

Source: [Http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n\\_000001390.asp](http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n_000001390.asp)

#### **Luxury housing development to save Iberian lynx**

WWF has launched a novel scheme to save the Iberian lynx *Lynx pardinus*. In collaboration with British environmental developers BioRegional and the Portuguese property developers Pelicano, the aim is to build a complex of 6,000 apartments, surrounded by restaurants, hotels and leisure facilities in Sesimbra in southern Portugal. The development will produce zero carbon emissions and zero waste. Most importantly, a levy will be charged on the sale of the houses and the money will go into a fund designed to reclaim 5,000 ha of the lynx's lost habitat. If this project is successful, there are plans to build another six such developments around Europe to help save threatened biodiversity. There are also plans for similar developments in China, Australia, the US and South Africa.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2475), 4.

### **North Eurasia**

#### **Caspian Sea caviar export quotas greatly reduced**

Around 90% of the world's caviar comes from sturgeon in the Caspian Sea but high levels of poaching and illegal trade are threatening species in the area. In response, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan have agreed to reduce their caviar export quotas for 2004. The combined 2004 export quota for beluga, the rarest and most valuable of all sturgeon, is 50%

of the 2003 level, while 2004 quotas for stellate sturgeon are 40% less and for Russian and Persian sturgeon 10% less than 2003 levels. This new approach gives governments a strong economic incentive to tackle illegal fishing because as illegal trade declines, legal exports, and thus government earnings, will rise in future years.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(11–12), 884.

#### **Major survey of Siberian tigers in the Russian Far East**

A team of conservationists led by the Wildlife Conservation Society is undertaking a range-wide survey of the Siberian (Amur) tiger, the first since 1996 when the population was estimated at 415–476 individuals. Tiger surveys are carried out in winter, when a blanket of snow allows researchers to survey the vast Sikhote-Alin mountain range, home to 95% of the remaining Siberian tigers. The survey began in December 2004 with the team searching for tracks left by tigers as they look for prey. These tracks will then allow experts to make an assessment of the minimum number of tigers in the area. The results of the previous survey and subsequent monitoring suggested that the tiger population had stabilized after declines in the early 1990s. However, recent indicators suggest numbers are again declining through a combination of fewer numbers of prey and poaching.

Source: [Http://wcs.org/353624/6433114](http://wcs.org/353624/6433114)

#### **Massive protest against Danube Delta project**

Ukraine is coming under increasing international pressure to halt the construction of a shipping canal through the ecologically sensitive Danube Delta. Despite these protests, work continues on the site. Ukrainian authorities say that the project carries no serious environmental risk but conservationists fear that the work will destroy bird and fish habitats. In the past few months the US and the EU have officially asked Ukraine to stop all construction work pending an independent scientific assessment. In response, Ukraine has promised to increase communication with those concerned about the project. Concerns have not just focused on biodiversity. Geologists have warned that the expansion will dramatically increase discharge from the Danube through the channel, depriving other parts of the delta of water and causing coastal erosion.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 431(7010), 727.

#### **Saker falcon smugglers foiled in Kyrgyzstan**

In late October 2004 authorities in the Central Asian state of Kyrgyzstan raided a Russian military base where they found seven boxes containing 127 saker falcons *Falco cherrug* being loaded on a plane bound for Syria. The birds were estimated to be worth US\$1 million and were bound for the lucrative falconry trade in the Middle East. There are thought to be only 60 saker falcons in Kyrgyzstan, so either the birds had been trapped on migration or brought in from a neighbouring country such as Kazakhstan. Saker falcons are listed on Appendix II of CITES but illegal global trade is driving the species to extinction. Most of the birds from the confiscated shipment were quickly returned to the wild although a few sick individuals remained in captivity.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2004), 26(4), 8.

### **North Africa and Middle East**

#### **Tunisia to create 15 new Ramsar sites**

Tunisia has announced that it is to protect 15 wetland sites under the Ramsar Convention. The total area to be protected is >750,000 ha and includes salt lakes, swamps, peat bogs, dunes, karstic caves, oases and lagoons. The wetlands of Tunisia attract up to half a million birds, including 350,000 sandpipers. In the migratory season 250,000 ducks visit the wetlands, along with 25,000 flamingos. Tunisia's wetlands are also of economic importance; Lake Ichkeul, currently the only Ramsar site in the country, provides 150–200 tons of fish per year, while the Ghar el Melah lagoon provides 80 tons. However, the wetlands are threatened by pollution, unplanned development and agriculture. It is estimated that Tunisia has lost 28% of its wetlands in a little over 100 years, mainly as a result of drainage. In addition, 27% of Tunisia's lakes and marshes and 21% of its rivers are polluted.

Source: [Http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16731](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16731)

#### **Syria a haven for threatened birds**

Very little is known about the avifauna of Syria but an expedition in early 2004 revealed breeding and/or wintering

populations of several globally threatened species, including the Critically Endangered sociable lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, the Endangered white-headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala* and the Vulnerable greater spotted eagle *Aquila clanga*. The expedition counted more than 400,000 waterbirds at natural and human-made wetlands, and in total 185 bird species were recorded. Another aim of the expedition was to pass on techniques and tools, including optical equipment, field guides and the use of GPS, to the Syrian conservationists who accompanied the team. Syria's fast-growing population and rapid changes in lifestyle and economic practices have already damaged some Important Bird Areas and there is an urgent need for systematic fieldwork to provide data for effective conservation.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2004), 26(4), 6.

### Two new national parks created in Turkey

The government of Turkey has recently created two new national parks. In October 2004 the Sarikamış Allahuekber Mountain National Park was established, covering 23,500 ha of predominantly coniferous forest ecosystems in Turkey's Caucasus region. A month later, the Mount Agri National Park was established in eastern Turkey near the Russian and Iranian borders; this park covers 87,830 ha and includes Turkey's highest peak, Mt Agri (5,137 m), also known as Mt Ararat, believed by many to be the biblical landing site of Noah's Ark. Together the two parks increase Turkey's protected areas to 797,000 ha.

Source: [http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news\\_cfm?uNewsID=16834](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news_cfm?uNewsID=16834)

## Sub-Saharan Africa

### Parasitic disease threatens reintroduced animals

A specialist in veterinary tropical diseases is warning that a parasitic disease, babesiosis, could kill just about any animal reintroduced into Africa. The *Babesia* parasite is transmitted by ticks and invades and destroys the host's blood cells, causing symptoms such as fever, anaemia and a swollen spleen. In the wild, rhinos, lions and other animals build up immunity to babesiosis. Reintroduced animals are susceptible in two ways. Firstly, the stress of reintroduction

may block the normal ability of their immune system to control the disease. Secondly, some animals bred in captivity have had no opportunity to build up natural immunity. Captive animals should be given imidocarb, a drug designed to prevent babesiosis in domestic cattle, before they are released. Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2474), 7.

### African rhinos on the increase

Latest estimates put Africa's total rhino population at 14,720 of which 3,630 are black rhinos, which have seen an increase of 500 (15%) in the past 2 years. There are currently 11,090 white rhinos, although as few as 20 are northern white rhino, a race now reduced to a tiny population in Garamba National Park on the border of Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. The increase in numbers of black rhino is encouraging after a decline from c. 65,000 in the 1970s to only 2,400 in the mid 1990s. However, there are still reckoned to be 90% fewer black rhinos than there were 30 years ago.

Source: *Swara* (2004), 27(3), 10–11.

### Study shows that mahoganies need specialized soils

A new study has shown that three of the four mahogany species in the Central African Republic are restricted to soils with particular chemical characteristics. Previous analyses of links between tree distribution and soil conditions have focused on features such as topography, missing out the importance of soil chemistry. There are practical implications of this study. It is notoriously difficult to improve mahogany regeneration and this work suggests that it is more feasible to plan long-term management of the trees *in situ* rather than continue with the traditional 'mining' of mahogany.

Source: *Ecology* (2004), 85, 8.

### Fertilizer could be key to controlling water hyacinth

A Kenyan scientist has produced a fertilizer from water hyacinth that contains high concentrations of critical plant nutrients. Water hyacinth has caused countless problems in waterways around the world, and if the process of production is proved to be practical this could well be a huge financial success. An American firm, BML International, is planning to put 3 billion shillings (US \$38 million) into the project. The fertilizer is prepared from the juices of water hyacinth and is available as a liquid. Ninety-five percent of the juices extracted from the plant can be used

directly while the rest can be processed into pellets that would serve as animal feed. The fertilizer is also 75% cheaper than other market equivalents.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(7–8), 528.

### A new approach to cheetah identification

The cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* is considered to be one of the most threatened cats in Africa. The total number in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated at 9,000–12,000. Population estimates rely on precise identification of individuals and a new photographic identification technique may help in this respect. The Masai-Mara Cheetah Conservation Project in Kenya has used photographic identification as a survey tool. The tail rings, and spot patterns on the face, chest, body and limbs are unique in the cheetah and therefore are used in identification. In the field, markings on the tail and limbs are of most practical use. Comparisons between animals can be made using the photographs or by using a 3-D computer matching system. There are various problems with this new method but it is economically and technically affordable and has been used successfully for the identification of individuals in Kenya.

Source: *Cat News* (2004), 41, 27–29.

### Plans for an 'eco-wall' in the Virunga National Park

The Virunga National Park covers an area of 800,000 ha straddling the borders of Rwanda, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo and is home to the threatened mountain gorilla *Gorilla beringei beringei*. Following reports of massive deforestation in the park's Mikenko sector as a result of encroachment by farmers and pastoralists, a coalition of conservation organizations and local communities are to build a dry stone wall in an attempt to prevent further damage. The 'eco-wall' will stretch for 20 km and patrols and inspections along its length will help monitor the situation. The project to build the wall includes a 2,000-plus workforce consisting of six Rwandan community associations and a further 12 Congolese associations.

Source: [http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news\\_cfm?uNewsID=17357](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news_cfm?uNewsID=17357)

### Bonobos under severe threat in Congo Basin

The first detailed survey of a known stronghold for bonobos or pygmy chimpanzees has found little evidence of

the species occurring there. The survey was conducted in the Salonga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo and covered an area of 12,000 km<sup>2</sup>. No live bonobos were encountered and sightings of nests and dung were made in only a quarter of the area surveyed. It is now thought that the bonobo population is *c.* 10,000, 80% fewer than was previously thought. The survey found abundant evidence of human encroachment into the park and of poaching. Salonga National Park was created in 1970 specifically to protect bonobos. If the situation is this serious in Salonga it can be assumed that the species is in crisis across the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Source: [http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n\\_0000001409.asp](http://www.wwf.org.uk/News/n_0000001409.asp)

#### **New map helps protect biodiversity hotspot of Maputaland**

A conservation map produced at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology in the UK has been used to help protect the area of Maputaland in South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique. Maputaland has recently been named as one of the 30 global conservation hotspots as it contains large numbers of endemic species. However, there is a threat from the spread of unplanned agriculture. The new map shows the areas that are most important for conserving the region's vegetation types and has just been used by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, the provincial conservation body, to guide the development of proposed eucalyptus plantations in the area.

Source: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/news/news.php?id=map.txt>

### **South and South-east Asia**

#### **Controversy over plans to save last Asiatic lions**

The Asiatic lion *Panthera leo persicus* is now confined to the Gir Forest in Gujarat State in western India. There have been plans to move some animals to a new location 1,000 km away in Madhya Pradesh. However, the government of Gujarat has refused to allow animals to be moved out of the state. A proposal for a second home for Asiatic lions was made in the early 1990s because Gir was already considered to be overcrowded, with more than 300 lions. The Gir lions

are also thought to be genetically inbred. The 345 km<sup>2</sup> Palpur-Kuno reserve near Shivpuri in northern Madhya Pradesh was chosen as a suitable second home. In September 2004 The Press Trust of India reported that the relocation would take place by the end of 2004 but a report 3 days earlier had said that the government of Gujarat had turned down a central government request for two or three prides of lions. In Gujarat the government has proposed establishing new reserves for lions but scientists believe this will not stop interbreeding between different lion groups increasing the problems of inbreeding. Palpur-Kuno is sufficiently far away to prevent interbreeding and is in former lion range. Source: *Cat News* (2004), 41, 5.

#### **New species of monkey described from India**

A new species of monkey *Macaca munzala* has been found in the north-east Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The Arunachal macaque was photographed during expeditions in 2003 and 2004 and is the first new macaque species to be described since 1903; it is also one of the highest-dwelling primates in the world, occurring at altitudes of 1,600–3,500 m. The status of the Arunachal macaque is unknown; macaques are not generally hunted for food or sport in this part of India but they can be killed in retaliation for crop raiding. Recent expeditions to Arunachal Pradesh have also reported leaf deer, black barking deer and the Chinese goral, all species previously unknown from India. An expedition to western Arunachal Pradesh in 2003 led to the state government creating a new protected area, the Tsangyang Gyatso Biosphere Reserve.

Source: <http://wcs.org/353624/6827362>

#### **Captive-breeding plan to prevent extinction of vultures in Pakistan**

The Pakistani Government and international conservation organizations are considering establishing a captive breeding programme in Pakistan for the white-backed vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, a species that, along with others in South Asia, has suffered serious declines because of the impact of the drug diclofenac (see *Oryx*, 38, p. 246). There are also proposals for studies on an isolated population of the long-billed vulture *Gyps indicus* in Nagar Parkar in Sindh. In the first phase of the captive breeding programme *c.* 75 birds would be collected to form 25 pairs. At least 85% of those collected would be nestlings. The breeding facility would

probably be at Changa Manga, which once held a sizeable vulture population. Source: [http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story\\_26-10-2004\\_pg7\\_24](http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_26-10-2004_pg7_24)

#### **Oil exploration threat to Terai Plains**

The Terai Plains in Nepal is an area of grasslands and open forest close to the border with India. It is home to Asian elephants, one-horned rhinos and tigers. However, the Nepalese Government is to allow oil exploration in the Terai Plains. While Cairn Energy has agreed not to explore for oil in protected areas that straddle the border between India and Nepal, there are concerns that a future discovery of oil could have a devastating impact on the area. In 2001 a project was launched to encourage the movement of animals in corridors between protected areas in both countries and this has been deemed a great success. Any disruption to these corridors could cause irreversible environmental damage.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), 22(11), 32.

#### **Captive breeding programme for threatened Owston's civet**

Three breeding pairs of Owston's civet *Chrotogale owstoni* have been exported from Vietnam to the UK to establish a captive breeding programme. Newquay Zoo, Thrigby Hall Wildlife Gardens and Paradise Wildlife Park are the first zoos to join the programme and it is planned to send more animals to institutions in the USA and possibly Australasia. Owston's civets live in the forests of northern and central Vietnam, Lao PDR and southern China and are threatened by hunting for their skins, meat and body parts, which are used in traditional medicine. The international breeding programme is linked to the Owston's Civet Conservation Program of Cuc Phuong National Park in Vietnam that has been working on small carnivore conservation for the past 9 years. During the work at Cuc Phuong, a number of Owston's civets have been rescued from the illegal wildlife trade by forest protection rangers and transferred to Cuc Phuong to establish a breeding population.

Source: Press release by Owston's Civet Conservation Program, 17 December 2004.

#### **Historic park declared on island of Halmahera**

Aketajawe-Lolobata on the Indonesian island of Halmahera has been declared

a national park following more than 8 years of discussions. The park will protect 167,300 ha of hill and lowland rainforest. The park is vital for at least 23 bird species endemic to North Maluku including Wallace's standard-wing *Semioptera wallacei* and three of Halmahera's four endemic bird species: sombre kingfisher *Halcyon funebris*, Halmahera cuckooshrike *Coracina parvula* and dusky oriole *Oriolus phaocromus*. The park is also home to the semi-nomadic Tobelo Dalam whose traditional lifestyle has been under increasing pressure as forests are logged and cleared for settlements and plantations.

Source: [Http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/11/halmahera.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2004/11/halmahera.html)

#### **New crustacean species discovered in the Philippines**

A recent expedition to the waters around the small island of Panglao in the Philippines has discovered over 1,200 species of prawns, crabs and lobsters, several dozen of which are thought to be new to science. The new discoveries have included 16 crab species, 12 hermit crab species and 15 mantis shrimp species. Many of these new species are tiny, only a few mm long. These results emphasize that the Sulu Sulawesi Sea is one of the most biologically diverse marine regions in the world. The diversity of marine ecosystems is still poorly understood: globally c. 275,000 marine species have been recorded but c. 1,800 new species are discovered each year, many from the deep ocean.

Source: [Http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16832](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16832)

### **East Asia**

#### **Stolen coral seized in Hainan**

A police ambush in Hainan found two trucks full of 40 tonnes of illegally harvested live coral. The coral was immediately returned to the sea in the hope that it would survive. It is thought that 95% of China's reefs are under significant threat, with the coral being used for aquarium ornaments, food and jewellery. China's most extensive coral reefs are located near the island of Hainan.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), **49**(7–8), 530.

### **North America**

#### **Canada's largest industrial forest FSC-certified**

Tembec, a Canadian forest products company, has been awarded a Forest Stewardship Council certificate for its forest resource management practices in British Columbia. Tembec's 140,000 ha Tree Farm License 14 is the largest industrial forest and the first in British Columbia to be certified under the rigorous FSC-BC standard. The forest is part of the traditional territory of the Ktunaxa Kinbasket First Nation, and Tembec manages it under a Crown land tenure issued by the government of British Columbia. Tembec and WWF Canada signed an historic accord in January 2001 to implement sustainable forest management and the company has plans to obtain certification for all 16 million ha of Canadian forest under its management by the end of 2005. So far, Tembec has obtained certification for 3 million ha including the Tree Farm License 14 certification.

Source: [Http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16770](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16770)

#### **Uncertainty over future funding for Sable Island research station**

Sable Island is an uninhabited 40 km-long crescent of sand off the east coast of Nova Scotia in Canada. Amongst other things, the island supports the world's largest breeding colony of grey seals *Halichoerus grypus* and one of the biggest mixed-species populations of terns in Canada. Its dunes, grasslands and freshwater ponds also support many rare plants and insects. However, the Canadian government is considering whether to continue to provide funding for a research station on the island. Without this facility, the island could be threatened by the impact of unauthorized visitors. Since 2000 the Canadian government has been supporting the research station but this funding may cease in March 2005.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2004), **22**(12), 30.

#### **US \$9 million is allocated for coral reef conservation**

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Coral Reef Conservation Program allocated US \$9 million for coral reef conservation and research activities in 2004. The grants supported a wide range of projects from

community conservation to large-scale coral reef observation systems. More than US \$3.2 million was invested in research in Florida where activities included reef mapping and monitoring of coral reef ecosystems, scientific and socioeconomic research, support for effective management and enforcement in marine reserves, reef restoration and educational outreach efforts.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), **49**(9–10), 677–678.

#### **Ecologists attack plans for Endangered Species Act**

Republican leaders are pushing for reform to the Endangered Species Act, which conservationists and ecologists fear could emasculate the law that has been in place since 1973. Governors of the western US states, which have the wildest landscapes and largest number of threatened species, intend to press for changes that would reduce the amount of land designated as critical habitat and make the scientific process for listing more explicit, moves that opponents believe would disarm the act. These moves coincided with the announcement that the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), who administer the act, had been advised not to list the greater sage grouse *Centrocercus urophasianus* as Endangered. Critics argue that this move is evidence of a softening of the enforcement of the act. All sides do agree that the USFWS does not have enough money to administer the act properly, resulting in continual legal battles.

Source: *Nature* (2004), **432**(7018), 661.

#### **Good news for right whales in the Bering Sea**

The National Oceanic and US Marine Fisheries Service has announced that they have located more threatened North Pacific right whales *Eubalaena glacialis*. In 2 days of research in the Bering Sea, scientists nearly doubled the tally of known right whales. These new sightings increased the known number of whales from 13 to at least 25. The right whale is one of the most threatened large whales in the world. Following protection in 1931 there has been a small but recovering population in the eastern North Pacific but illegal harvesting has had a serious impact and there have been concerns that the species was heading for extinction. Recently there have also been sightings of several threatened blue whales in remote waters in the Gulf of Alaska.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), **49**(9–10), 677.

### Concerns over impact of Alaskan oil spill

On 7 December 2004 the Malaysian freighter *Selendang Ayu* broke in two after running aground off Unalaska Island in the Aleutian island chain. The ship was carrying 483,000 gallons of heavy bunker fuel and 21,000 gallons of diesel fuel, although the amount of fuel spilled is unknown. The fuel spill threatens an area identified in 1997 by WWF and The Nature Conservancy as one of the highest priorities in the Bering Sea. The spill is likely to have an impact on important commercial fisheries as well as local subsistence fishing and sensitive wildlife. There have since been calls for a risk assessment of shipping routes in the Bering Sea, including the Great Circle Route, the primary shipping route between the west coast of North America and Asia.

Source: [http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=17250](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=17250)

### Historic deal for Great Smoky Mountains National Park

The Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) and conservation groups have struck a deal that will protect c. 4,050 ha of land next to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the Appalachian mountains. ALCOA has operated four hydroelectric dams near the park for 40 years and under the new relicensing agreement the company is required to mitigate any damage that their electricity projects may cause. As part of the agreement ALCOA will exchange 75 ha of biologically sensitive land it currently owns for 40 ha of submerged land in the national park. The company will also prevent logging, road building and other destructive activities on a further 2,424 ha of land. Outdoor recreation activities would be allowed on the remaining 1,616 ha of land.

Source: *National Parks* (2004), 78(3), 8–9.

### Central America and Caribbean

#### Paraguay bans conversion of Atlantic Forest

A new law passed by the parliament in Paraguay will forbid the conversion of native forests in the eastern region of the country for an initial period of 2 years. This will put a halt to deforestation in the

Upper Paraná Atlantic Forest. Until now much of the deforestation in the Atlantic Forest was legal, and according to Paraguay's forest law, landowners were obliged only to keep at least 25% of their land as a forest reserve, with the remaining open to agriculture. The new law will not allow landowners to deforest any further, even if forests comprise more than 25% of their land.

Source: [http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16890](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16890)

### Pacific

#### Plans for improved protection for leatherback turtles in South Pacific

Environmentalists and local villagers from all over Melanesia recently met in Honiara in the Solomon Islands to develop a 3-year plan of priority actions to support regional turtle conservation in the South Pacific. The plan focuses particularly on the leatherback turtle *Dermochelys coriacea* whose numbers in the Pacific region have fallen by 97% in 22 years. Actions identified at the meeting included raising the profile of community-based research and monitoring, reviving the use of traditional knowledge and increasing the level of training for communities. Delegates also accepted the need to assess current legislation and policy to improve turtle protection and law enforcement, including issues of bycatch and cross-boundary collaboration.

Source: [http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16710](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16710)

#### First convictions for shark finning in Guam

In September 2004 two men pleaded to and were found guilty of violations of the Shark Finning Prohibition Act and Lacey Act. This was the first arrest, charge and conviction under these provisions since the shark finning ban was implemented in 2002. The two were crew members of a Japanese-flagged fishing vessel that illegally offloaded c. 520 pieces of shark fins from their ship in Apra Harbor, Guam in July 2004. The defendants admitted trying to smuggle the fins to the Philippines where they would be sold. The Shark Finning

Prohibition Act makes it illegal to offload any shark fins into a US port unless they also offload the carcasses from which the fins were obtained.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(9–10), 678.

### Australia/Antarctica/New Zealand

#### Legal fight to stop Japanese whalers

Japan's whaling fleet has once again set sail for the Southern Ocean to hunt its annual 'scientific' quota of 440 minke whales *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*. However, the Federal Court of Australia is to decide whether to allow Human Society International to proceed with an application for a restraining order that would prevent Japan's whalers from hunting within an area known as the Australian Whale Sanctuary. The sanctuary was set up in 2000 and encompasses all of Australia's waters, including those it claims off Antarctica. If the application is allowed it is possible that a temporary restraining order could be in place before the whaling fleet moves into the sanctuary in February 2005. A final hearing in mid 2005 would then decide if a permanent injunction could be granted.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2474), 5.

#### Australia to get tough on fishing pirates

Fishing pirates in the Southern Ocean are being specifically targeted by the Australian Government who are seeking agreement from nation members of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources to end illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic waters. As well as improving patrolling and calling for a centralized vessel monitoring programme, Australia is also supporting improvements to the Catch Documentation Scheme for toothfish to make it difficult for unlawful catches to be landed and sold. The highly prized Patagonian toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides* is being threatened by illegal poaching. There have also been calls for a publicly available ships-of-shame register to identify those known to be fishing illegally in the Southern Ocean.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(11–12), 884.



### Ningaloo coral reef receives more protection

Ningaloo is a fragile coral reef stretching nearly 300 km along the remote coastline of Western Australia. It is one of the longest fringing coral reefs in the world and hosts many threatened species such as turtles, dugongs, whales and whale sharks. A recent decision by the government of Western Australia has increased the area protected from fishing in the Ningaloo Marine Reef Park from 10 to 34%. The new plans allow for recreational fishing in two-thirds of the park while setting aside one-third for the preservation of natural ecosystems. This decision follows one by the Australian Government to increase the area protected in the Great Barrier Reef from 4.6 to 33.4%, meaning that over 11 million ha of this world famous reef are now protected by a network of sanctuaries.

Source: [http://www.panda.org/news\\_facts/newsroom/other\\_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16851](http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16851)

### Cut in hoki quota is welcomed by conservationists in New Zealand

In September 2004 the New Zealand Fisheries Minister announced major cuts to the hoki quota, with a catch limit of 100,000 tonnes. Conservationists have welcomed the move but feel that further cuts may be necessary to New Zealand's largest fishery if recruitment of juvenile fish continues to be low. The western hoki stock off the west coast of South Island is estimated to be c. 20% of what it was in the 1980s and could be as low as 13% of the original stock size. The hoki fishery has also had serious problems with bycatch. Between 1989 and 2000, 6,200 fur seals were estimated to have drowned in the western hoki

fishery alone and c. 1,000 seabirds are killed annually in the whole hoki fishery. Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation* (2004), 136, 4.

### New Zealand ratifies Cartagena Protocol

In September 2004 the New Zealand Government ratified the Cartagena Protocol on biosecurity. The Protocol is an addition to the Convention on Biological Diversity and aims to ensure that the export of genetically engineered organisms does not undermine the biosecurity of the importing country. Conservationists have applauded the decision as a commitment by government on biosecurity matters that potentially threatened the long-term existence of native plants and animals.

Source: *Forest & Bird Conservation* (2004), 136, 3.

### Major new initiative to protect New Zealand's plants

New Zealand is internationally renowned as a plant biodiversity hotspot: 80% of the country's vascular plants are endemics. However, the flora has been in decline and in a recent conservation assessment four vascular plant taxa were listed as extinct and 119 native vascular plants were classified as 'acutely threatened'. A further 102 taxa are in serious or gradual decline and 502 taxa are 'at risk'. The New Zealand Plant Conservation Network is a major new initiative that aims to halt these declines. The Network has brought together botanists, horticulturalists and representatives of restoration groups, conservation organizations, botanic gardens, zoos, local councils, universities and the government's Department of Conservation. The work of the Network has been structured

around the 16 targets of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. Source: *Forest & Bird* (2004), 314, 10.

### Measures to safeguard krill in the Antarctic

In November 2004 marine biologists and government officials met in Australia to agree safeguards for Antarctic krill *Euphausia superba*. Melting ice in the region is a threat to these small pink crustaceans that underpin vital ecosystems and are already threatened by commercial fishing. A research team from the British Antarctic Survey has suggested that the krill population is declining with the retreat of the winter sea ice, which most scientists believe is being driven by global climate change. Krill are mainly caught as food for domestic animals and fish, and while the fishery is relatively small at present, most observers expect that to change rapidly as technology allows krill to be harvested more efficiently. The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Living Marine Resources, which regulates Southern Ocean fisheries, hopes to have a new monitoring framework in place before any boom in the krill fisheries.

Source: *Nature* (2004), 432(7013), 4.

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