

The 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress

'Imagine 3,000 doctors hovering over your hospital bed in an emergency room after a grisly traffic accident, discussing the intricacies of your situation, but not actually utilizing their skills to avert your possible death. This must be exactly how Planet Earth feels each time another major international environmental conference takes place' (*The Nation, Bangkok*, Editorial, 17 November 2004). In the run-up to the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress in Bangkok last November, this was the general view of the local media, which heaped sharp criticism on a conservation community seemingly addicted to endless talking shops, recycling the same old slogans but achieving little of practical value. Having never attended such a meeting I was intrigued to find out what does go on, and whether such views are fair.

The Congress, which takes place every 4 years, brings together the various governmental and non-governmental members of IUCN to set out its latest policies and agenda. In Bangkok it consisted of three parts. The first part prior to the official opening on 17 November was a series of closed-door meetings of the six scientific commissions of IUCN. This was followed by the 3-day World Conservation Forum, a huge jamboree of presentations, debates, training workshops and cultural events centred around four themes: Ecosystem Management, Health, Poverty and Conservation, Biodiversity Loss and Species Extinction, and Markets, Business and the Environment.

Over 350 different sessions were held during the Forum, in a multitude of parallel streams. Days often began with breakfast meetings at 7 a.m. and continued through back-to-back sessions lasting into the evening. Some were rigorously scientific and presented new research findings; sessions on marine fisheries management, biological indicators of conservation success and factors affecting the sustainability of consumptive use stood out in this respect.

Others, including many of the Health, Poverty and Conservation sessions, were more overtly political and driven by debate over contentious issues. The Forum coincided with the publication of a rather damning article on the failure of large conservation NGOs to take into account indigenous peoples' rights whilst at the same time amassing hundreds of millions of dollars annually, often from development donors, to pursue exclusionist and protectionist conservation strategies.

This led to some heated defence and counter-claim that livened some of the debates. The alleged instruction to their delegates by one of the large NGOs to ensure that they mentioned 'local people' at least three times in each of their presentations will do little to deflect accusations of cynicism and spin. The findings of a review of the livelihood benefits of Global Environment Facility projects seemed to support the conclusion that impacts were minimal even where planned, and that not enough was being done to take account of human needs, undertake social assessments or properly engage with stakeholders. In light of this it was heartening to see efforts being made to establish an international and interdisciplinary Poverty and Conservation Learning Group as a means to share experiences.

As with many conferences, 3 days was too short for the amount of material covered. In addition, although the Queen Sirikit Convention Centre was vast, outside the plenary halls it was not sufficiently subdivided to prevent the spillover of noise between the various partitioned off meeting rooms and public spaces. As a result many presentations and debates were disrupted, and difficult to follow. Others were poorly attended, and rarely did people venture to sessions beyond their own interest or comfort zone. I was particularly disappointed at the low turnout for a session on private sector involvement in conservation and protected area management. The growing linkages between big business and NGOs, and the spread of privatization of parks, particularly in Africa, are issues with major implications for conservation and for local communities in resource-rich areas. It was a shame that almost none of those engaged in the poverty and conservation debate recognized this and made time to attend.

The real work of the Congress took place during the third and final part, the Members' Business Assembly during 22–25 November. It was here that 114 motions were debated and voted on to generate resolutions and recommendations (see <http://www.iucn.org> and <http://www.iisd.ca/sd/iucn/wcc3/> for further details). Resolutions adopted by IUCN covered climate change, freshwater systems, mountains, indigenous people's rights, the impacts of armed conflict and, somewhat unusually, the threats to biodiversity of the Olympic Games. The Congress also resolved to facilitate the establishment of a World Conservation Learning Network of universities and training institutes to expand access to programmes that integrate conservation and sustainable

development. Perhaps the most controversial resolution called for a moratorium on further releases of genetically modified organisms.

Recommendations approved by the Congress recognized the value of consumptive use and promoted the application of the precautionary principle, besides covering a range of site and species-specific topics. These included a recommendation to strengthen and enforce legislation to conserve the saiga antelope in Central Asia. The latter arose from an informal dialogue on saiga conservation among the four main range states and the Chinese government earlier in the Congress. A status report confirmed that Saiga population numbers had plummeted from 1 million in 1990 to some 31,000 individuals by 2003 (see *Oryx*, 38, 250–251), and those at the dialogue meeting pledged to cooperate to tackle the illegal trade in saiga horn.

At a regional level, a high level meeting of five Mekong river countries agreed on the need for transboundary environmental impact assessments for future hydroelectric projects. Previous developments have had damaging impacts on downstream countries and the agreement was seen as a breakthrough for regional environmental cooperation. A late amendment by Vietnam requiring the agreement of neighbouring countries before the construction of dams threatened the motion. However, it was eventually passed in revised form, urging the Mekong River states to take appropriate action to protect and conserve water for future generations, to enhance dialogue and cooperation, to adopt an ecosystem approach to the management of water resources, and to establish a system of freshwater protected areas within the framework of integrated river basin management.

Alongside its deliberations, the Assembly elected a new President of IUCN, Valli Moosa, who succeeds Yolande Kakabadse. An experienced politician, Valli Moosa was appointed Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in South Africa in 1999, and was a driving force behind the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Vth IUCN World Parks Congress, both held recently in South Africa. Also elected were the Chairs of the six IUCN Commissions.

So how valuable was the whole process? An event such as this, bringing together so many people at such vast expense is an easy target for criticism. For sceptical observers, it is difficult to see how the environmental impacts of several thousand delegates flying to Bangkok could be justified by talk alone (how many of those delegates paid to offset the carbon costs of their travel, as encouraged on the Congress registration website?). Unlike the UN, the resolutions adopted by IUCN are not legally binding and so would appear to have only limited scope for effectiveness.

Such a view perhaps misses the point. For me, the greatest value of the Congress was in enabling the huge suite of practical efforts and initiatives being undertaken by conservationists throughout the world to be shared and discussed. The opportunity to engage with old acquaintances and new contacts working on similar issues, to discover emerging ideas and initiatives, and to learn that, very often, everyone else is struggling with the same dilemmas as oneself, was valuable. Much of this, as is often the case, took place informally outside the organized sessions, but it is still valuable. The distillation of the collective knowledge, views and experience of delegates into resolutions and recommendations may not hold legal weight, and the process may have been dominated by larger, wealthier and more vocal groups with little substantive plenary debate, but the congress, does signal an international commitment to a range of policies and priorities that can help to guide conservation work and, perhaps, be used to influence decision makers.

Many such decision makers were in attendance. If the talking in Bangkok helps them to act to save the saiga from the brink of extinction, to protect the Mekong River from unsustainable development, to bridge the gap between conservation and indigenous peoples, and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals without compromising biodiversity, then the Congress will have done its job.

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The Sahara Conservation Fund

In 1998 the 14 countries that make up the greater Sahelo-Saharan region of North Africa (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia) met on the Tunisian island of Djerba to discuss the future of their embattled wildlife. Under the aegis of the Convention on Migratory Species a plan of action was adopted for the conservation of the addax and scimitar-horned oryx, and the dama, dorcas, Cuvier's and slender-horned gazelles. The oryx was already thought to be extinct, with the others mostly either endangered or critically so. How an entire faunal assembly, including other species such as the cheetah, Barbary sheep, wild dog and striped hyaena, could find itself in such a dire state can only be put down to gross negligence and, perhaps to a lesser degree, ignorance. Apart from a brief period during the 1970s when international attention was focused on desertification and its impact on natural resources, and a couple of flagship projects run jointly by WWF and

IUCN, the Sahel and the Sahara are simply not part of the 'hotspot' dominated international conservation landscape. Locally, too, effective conservation has been patchy at best, beggared by a chronic lack of resources and motivation.

Djerba was a determining moment for Sahelo-Saharan conservation, bringing together the range states and playing an important role in creating interest around the issues that are still affecting the region's wildlife and natural habitats: excessive hunting, desertification, over-grazing and habitat encroachment. What Djerba also did was to spur a handful of conservation practitioners to establish an informal network for the conservation of all Sahelo-Saharan wildlife, the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group. Its members, including zoos, scientific research, non-governmental and governmental agencies, have raised the profile of Sahelo-Saharan conservation, provided funds for small projects, carried out fieldwork, campaigned for change, and fostered within their own institutions a new commitment to the region. Inputs from members such as the Smithsonian Institution, Saint Louis Zoological Park, Marwell Preservation Trust, the Living Desert, Hannover Zoo, the Cincinnati Zoological Park and Botanical Garden, and the Zoological Society of London are turning the dream of wildlife reintroduction in countries such as Niger, Morocco and Tunisia into reality. Similarly, surveys in Chad and Niger, with strong support from local wildlife authorities, have filled information gaps and identified priority sites for conservation action.

The Group has now grown into a network of more than 100 partners, and a more formal, legal entity – the Sahara Conservation Fund – has therefore been established to further the Group's work and aims. The new Fund's mission is to conserve the wildlife of the Sahara and bordering Sahelian grasslands, with ecological processes functioning naturally, species existing in self-supporting numbers across their historical range, and conservation support being derived from stakeholders across all sectors of society. The Fund sees this being achieved through strong partnerships, and believes in the importance of capacity building and in the training of the next generation of wildlife managers and conservationists.

With the scimitar-horned oryx already extinct in the wild, and the addax, dama and slender-horned gazelles all Critically Endangered, the conservation community must act now. Other agencies, including the Global Environment Facility and France's own version, the Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial, are helping. The zoo world too is also increasingly turning its conservation rhetoric into conservation action, and a number of institutions are already providing funds, animals and leadership. With the big international conservation agencies seemingly locked into biodiversity

hotspots and wilderness areas, one of the hottest and wildest spots of them all – the Sahara desert – goes unnoticed and unassisted and along with it one of the world's most precious and uniquely adapted faunal assemblages.

In 1978 I wrote in *Oryx* that 'It is not over-dramatizing the situation to say, that unless new measures are taken and old ones, such as the rigorous control of poaching, stepped up, the scimitar-horned oryx will be extinct in the wild, even inside the reserves that exist, before the end of the century (*Oryx*, 14, 219–221). Sadly, it appears that I was right. Let us hope that the Sahara Conservation Fund is successful in helping prevent the loss of more species and even in restoring the scimitar-horned oryx to its rightful home.

For more information on the Fund and its work, contact its Chair, Dr. Steven Monfort, c/o The Conservation Research Center, 1500 Remount Road, Front Royal, Virginia, 22630, USA.

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The Massif du Termit: the last sanctuary for Sahelo-Saharan wildlife?

The Massif du Termit is a long, low-lying chain of rocky outcrops and plateaux situated in the south-east of the Republic of Niger. Straddling the interface between the grasslands of the Sahel and the Sahara desert, Termit and its environs comprise a wide variety of habitat types, ranging from open sandy ergs and volcanic peaks to stony plateaux and mountain valleys. Although rainfall is generally <100 mm annually, the mountainous relief allows water to concentrate in the numerous drainage channels and alluvial pans, giving rise to a surprising variety of plant life.

Although the massif itself appears to have been little documented in the past, the greater Termit area was crossed by the early Saharan explorers such as Denham and Clapperton, Barth, Nachtigal and Vischer. All of them were astounded at the abundance of the region's game. In more recent times the late French photographer Alain Dragesco documented Termit's remarkable but already vulnerable Sahelo-Saharan biodiversity. Termit is a veritable sanctuary, with over 20 species of mammal, an as yet undetermined number of reptiles, and over 60 species of birds.

Over the past 5 years a number of scientific missions and surveys have documented the area's wildlife and pointed to its rapid decline and high degree of endangerment. Of particular concern is a whole suite of Red Listed species, including the addax, dama gazelle, cheetah, relict and isolated population of Barbary sheep, and a

number of Data Deficient species, including bustards, vultures, and small carnivores such as pale fox, Rüppell's fox and sand cat. Termit also harbours what may be one of the last populations of the spurred tortoise.

The area's small addax population is probably the largest remaining in the wild. Surveys by teams from Niger's Direction de la Faune, de la Pêche et de la Pisciculture (DFPP) have confirmed that there is still suitable habitat for Sahelo-Saharan wildlife in the Air/Ténéré, Tadress and Termit regions. On the basis of feedback from local people, they also reported the presence of a resident population of c. 100–150 addax in Termit. France's Institut de Recherche pour le Développement/Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle/Société Zoologique de Paris (IRD/SZP) carried out a faunal inventory and observed 36 addax. Teams from the Convention on Migratory Species/Fonds Français pour l'Environnement Mondial and the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group have further confirmed the presence of addax to the east of the Termit Massif. A transect-based survey of c. 8,800 km² of addax habitat carried out by the Group in February 2004 estimated an addax population of 223. In August of the same year, with scientific assistance from IRD/SZP and funding support from the French government and the Observatory of the Sahel, a local NGO, SOS Faune du Niger, organized and conducted with DFPP an aerial survey using three ultra-light aircraft provided by the Groupe Aérien du Niger. A complete count was carried out across an area of 9,300 km², returning a total of 128 addax.

Termit also harbours one of the last remaining populations of North African cheetah. Both the Sahelo-Saharan Interest Group and IRD/SZP missions recorded its presence in several localities, the latter being able to observe and photograph three different individuals. Local Toubou nomads report little conflict with cheetah but recognize that its numbers are falling, as are Barbary sheep and dama gazelles, which are being picked off by local hunters. Like the now presumed extinct scimitar-horned oryx, the dama gazelle is slipping inexorably towards extirpation in the wild. New threats are also apparent as hunters and falconers from the Gulf States extend their activities throughout North Africa. Unless seriously controlled, hunting of gazelles and bustards could rapidly lead to further significant declines or extinction of already threatened wildlife populations.

Can Termit and what remains of its wildlife be saved before it, like the rest of the vast Sahelo-Saharan zone of Africa (an area of c. 10 million km² shared by 14 nations), is emptied of its larger mammals and birds? With new initiatives, and in particular the work of local NGOs, there is hope action can be taken to build on the

knowledge that already exists and to mobilize the government, local authorities and NGOs. Failure to do so will not only have a high price in terms of Niger's own wildlife resources but may well result in further extinctions of what is already one of the world's most threatened faunal assemblages – the large mammals of the Sahel and the Sahara.

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Identifying priorities for conservation intervention around the Udzungwa Mountains National Park, Tanzania

The Eastern Arc Mountains are a chain of 14 mountain blocks supporting ancient rainforests with globally important levels of endemism for plants and animals. Until 1992 forest conservation in one of the most important mountain blocks, the Udzungwa Mountains, was addressed only by the Forest and Beekeeping Division of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, through a network of Forest Reserves managed to protect water catchments. In 1992 a long standing proposal to upgrade several of the Forest Reserves to National Park status was partly completed by the Government of Tanzania when they gazetted the 1,990 km² Udzungwa Mountains National Park at the eastern end of this mountain block. Since then further biological surveys have shown that the Park, although critically important, does not include some of the most important forest areas in the Udzungwas.

In 2003 the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, based at Conservation International in Washington DC, agreed a US \$7 million grant to support conservation efforts in the Eastern Arc and Coastal Forests of Tanzania and Kenya hotspot, and prioritized project support to the Udzungwa Mountains National Park and its surroundings. In order to identify priority activities that would enhance conservation in the Udzungwa Mountains, and be eligible for support, a stakeholders' workshop was held during 15–17 December 2004 in Morogoro, Tanzania. The workshop was convened by WWF-Tanzania and supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, the UNDP/GEF funded project Conservation and Management of the Eastern Arc Mountain Forests, and the Forest and Beekeeping Division and Tanzanian

National Parks Authority of the Tanzanian Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism.

The 45 participants at the workshop comprised representatives from local communities, local government, Tanzanian national authorities, and biological researchers, as well as commercial operations including Kilombero Valley Teak Company and Illovo Sugar Company. Non-governmental organizations including WWF-Tanzania, the Tanzanian Forest Conservation Group and the Wildlife Conservation Society were also present.

The workshop focused on four biologically important areas around the Park: the lowland Magombera Forest (important for *Iringa red colobus*) and its connections to the Selous Game Reserve, the Uzungwa Scarp Forest Reserve that was included in the original 1980s proposal for the Park, the Ndundulu and Nyumbanitu forests within the West Kilombero Scarp Forest Reserve (which are adjacent to the Park's western boundaries and contain several endemic species that do not occur in the Park), and the large mammal movement corridors between the Park and Mikumi National Park and the Selous Game Reserve. Workshop participants were tasked to provide information on the current status of each area, list the relevant stakeholders, list conservation problems and solutions, and propose projects that could be funded to tackle conservation problems.

The Magombera Forest remains unprotected, despite efforts since the early 1980s to include the forest within the Selous Game Reserve. The forest supports *c.* 1,000 *Iringa red colobus* and four endemic plant species. Two projects were suggested: one to meet the needs of communities adjacent to Magombera Forest, and a second to ensure Magombera forest is legally protected.

Uzungwa Scarp Forest Reserve possess the highest density of endemic animals in the Udzungwa Mountain block, including the largest population of the endemic *Sanje mangabey*. It is also part of the original proposed area of the Park. Three projects were suggested: restoring connectivity between Uzungwa Scarp Forest Reserve and the Park to the east, developing Participatory Forest Management with surrounding communities, and assessing the feasibility of upgrading protection of this reserve.

The Ndundulu and Nyumbanitu Mountains are part of the West Kilombero Scarp Forest Reserve and abut the western border of the Park. These areas support narrowly endemic animals that do not occur in the Park. Researchers have proposed including these mountains within the Park, but there are other possible management options. In 2003 the entire area was placed under Participatory Forest Management, with a legal agreement signed between the Forest and Beekeeping Division

and the local villages, and the workshop concluded that these agreements make upgrading the status of this Reserve difficult. The projects suggested seek to support and monitor the effectiveness of the current Participatory Forest Management in the Reserve. Activities suggested include providing water to Udekwa Village, developing income generating projects, and improving villagers capacity to manage the forest.

Large mammals, elephants and buffalo in particular, move between the Udzungwa Mountains, the Selous Game Reserve, Mikumi National Park and even Ruaha National Park, making this the only Eastern Arc block where such movements still occur. Project activities identified were to identify, survey and map viable wildlife corridors, raise awareness, restore existing corridors, develop land use plans, develop various forms of community-based and government-community management regimes, and support improved farming systems.

The Udzungwa stakeholders' workshop was successful in bringing out important conservation issues and in identifying projects that, if successfully implemented, will enhance the conservation status of the Udzungwa Mountains and surrounding area. Funding from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and other donors should be coordinated to support identified projects. Partnerships between civil society and government agencies are required to receive funding and to deliver sustainable conservation impact. The workshop conclusions highlighted the point made in the opening address by the Morogoro Regional Administrative Secretary that 'the loss of these forests would cause an economic and ecological disaster of untold magnitude'. We hope that projects funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund will help prevent this happening, and also provide enhanced benefits to the people of the Udzungwa Mountains.

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Amchang, Barail and Dihing-Patkai – Assam's new wildlife sanctuaries

In June 2004 the government of Assam, India, declared three new wildlife sanctuaries: Amchang, Barail and Dihing-Patkai. The 79 km² of Amchang is located near Guwahati, Assam's capital city. This hilly sanctuary includes three reserve forests: Amchang, South

Amchang and Khanapara. The area has a tropical monsoon climate with 1,000–1,500 mm annual rainfall. The vegetation is dominated by tropical moist deciduous forest that harbours slow loris, Assamese macaque, rhesus macaque, capped langur, hoolock gibbon, Chinese pangolin, leopard, tiger, Asian elephant, gaur, wild pig, sambar and muntjac. Pig-tailed and stump-tailed macaques have also been reported. Occasionally greater one-horned rhinoceros stray from the nearby Pabitora wildlife sanctuary. Among threatened birds, greater adjutant stork and white-backed vulture have been recorded. Some settlers of the Garo tribe carry out charcoal making while a few tea growers have attempted to encroach some areas.

The 326 km² Barail sanctuary is located in Cachar district. Hilly and mountainous, the main vegetation type is tropical wet evergreen rainforest at lower elevations and subtropical broadleaf forest in higher areas. The area has a tropical monsoon and subtropical climate with 2,500–5,000 mm annual rainfall. Seven species of primates are found: slow loris, Assamese macaque, stump-tailed macaque, pig-tailed macaque, rhesus macaque, capped langur and hoolock gibbon. Tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, fishing cat, Temminck's golden cat and marbled cat have been reported. Asiatic black bear and Malayan sun bear, binturong, spotted linsang, gaur, serow, wild pig, sambar and muntjac are also found. There are records of lesser adjutant stork, white-cheeked hill partridge, rufous-necked hornbill, great pied hornbill and beautiful nuthatch. *Jhum*, or shifting cultivation, illegal felling of trees and poaching by local tribes are major threats.

Dihing-Patkai is 111 km² of Upper Dihing, Joypur and Dirak reserve forests in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts. The terrain is low hills with flat plains. The main vegetation is tropical wet evergreen rainforest, and the area has a tropical monsoon climate with 2,000–2,500 mm annual rainfall. A globally important population of white-winged wood duck is found here. The primates are similar to those of Barail wildlife sanctuary. Tiger, leopard, clouded leopard, leopard cat, Temminck's golden cat, marbled cat, jungle cat, elephant, gaur, serow, wild pig, sambar and muntjac also occur there. Noteworthy birds recorded include white-bellied heron, lesser adjutant stork, rufous-necked hornbill, brown hornbill and beautiful nuthatch. Near threatened birds include great pied hornbill, and white-cheeked hill partridge. Exploration for petroleum in the immediate vicinity is the main threat.

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Historic changes in status of Caribbean coot in the Netherlands Antilles

The Caribbean coot *Fulica caribaea* is a Caribbean endemic bird, confined to the chain of islands from the southern Bahamas to Trinidad, with smaller numbers in north-west Venezuela and off-lying islands. Its conservation status has always been somewhat obscured as it was formerly considered conspecific with American coot *F. americana*, a species that winters in large numbers in the Caribbean. On most of the islands within its range the Caribbean coot is uncommon to rare. Currently the species is considered Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List as it has suffered a marked decline throughout the Caribbean as a result of hunting pressure, egg collection, habitat loss and introduced predators. It is a breeding resident in only nine of the 21 countries within its range. In the remaining countries it has been recorded as a vagrant or non-breeding resident. In parts of its range, such as St Kitts and Nevis, and Barbados, it no longer breeds. The southern Caribbean islands are arid, with few permanent water sources, and there Caribbean coot is an eruptive and irregular breeder and is not present year-round. In the less arid parts of its range it is largely dependent on freshwater lakes, ponds, marshes and, to a lesser extent, coastal brackish lagoons.

We compiled records of Caribbean coot from the Netherlands Antilles, i.e. the Leeward Group of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, off Venezuela, and the Windward Group of Saba, St Eustatius and St Maarten, in the Lesser Antilles. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Netherlands Antilles saw a boom in tourism and generally an increase in economic activities. This has resulted in the establishment of a number of permanent freshwater sources, including ponds at golf courses and wastewater treatment plants near large hotel complexes and major towns. Comparing records for the period 1938–1979 (n=93) with those from 1980–2004 (n=53), we found that for the Leeward Group the species' status changed from an irregular breeder in the 1950s on Curaçao only, to a regular breeder on all three islands. Pre-1980 records mostly refer to single birds or small parties, whereas later records also refer to large groups of up to several hundreds of individuals. For the Windward Group we only found records for St Maarten, and with no permanent freshwater sources on Saba or St Eustatius the species seems genuinely absent from these islands. On St Maarten the species has always had a restricted distribution and nowadays it is present in the low hundreds at most.

The post-1980 records are from all months, and numbers of breeding birds have significantly increased in the last 50 years. On Aruba, breeding was firstly recorded in 1977 and at present a small permanent

breeding population can be found at a freshwater sewage pond and the ponds of a nearby golfcourse. On Bonaire breeding was first recorded in 1974 and breeding populations are present at three reservoirs, whereas on Curaçao the first breeding records dates back to 1956. Nowadays a large breeding population is present at a reservoir, and since 1993 the species has established itself at a wastewater treatment plant and its overflow. For St Maarten breeding was firstly recorded in 1981 and is confined to the southernmost part of the island. As such, the situation on the Netherlands Antilles compares favourably to other parts of the Caribbean coot's range.

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Conservation team reveals 'floating' islands

Despite initial skepticism from the scientific community, members of the Marsh Deer Project 2003, a research and conservation initiative in Argentina funded by the BP Conservation Programme, have collected convincing evidence that marsh islands in the Parana River Delta actually float when the water level of the wetlands rise, and thus provide shelter to the resident marsh deer population during the frequent floods. The difficulty of access to the area required the development of an innovative and unique methodology, including aerial surveillance and electronic monitoring beneath the water. In February, May, October and November, low to medium water level conditions were monitored. Data from the electronic surveillance equipment revealed that the soil of these 'islands' moved vertically during flood conditions, carrying with them vegetation, 3-m trees, and any deer that happened to be there. Then in November a high-level flood occurred, and the team was able to observe the deer's behaviour. On the floating marshes more than 30 deer were observed at high water-level conditions. More in depth studies are necessary, but in the meantime the team is working to increase awareness about the species by distributing literature and visiting schools. In addition, they have met with municipal, provincial and national wildlife authorities to develop a new strategy to reinforce poaching restrictions in the area, and the possibility of a Ramsar designation for the Entre Ríos Province of Argentina is being discussed with another NGO.

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Endangered species library now available

John Burton, former Executive Secretary of the Fauna & Flora Preservation Society, as it was then, has been gathering Red Data books for the past 20 years, and has now amassed one of the largest collections in the world. This resource has recently been used in preparing an analysis of selected endangered European invertebrates, funded by English Nature, and is currently being used for a detailed study of threatened European chrysomelid beetles. It was also used to carry out a review of Asian Red Lists for the World Bank. In addition to the extensive collection of Red Data books from all over the world, the library contains all published editions of the IUCN Red Data books, as well as several working drafts (not available in the IUCN libraries), and all the IUCN/SSC Action Plans. A selection of popular books relating to threatened species and protected areas is also held, together with action plans from Europe, USA and Australia. While the library is not open to the public, it can be made available to bona fide researchers, and a catalogue is in preparation. Anyone wishing to consult the library should in the first instance contact John Burton at jab@worldlandtrust.org

Critically Endangered Sumatran tiger threatened by organized hunt

Porbi, a Sumatran pig hunting association, is planning a hunt with up to a thousand men and dogs in an area adjoining one of the most important tiger sanctuaries in the world. Although the area designated for the hunt is outside Sumatra's Kerinci-Seblat National Park borders, Critically Endangered and protected wildlife that will be threatened includes Sumatran tigers, Asian golden cats, clouded leopards, Malay tapir, sun bears and at least four species of deer. Evidence suggests that the skins of two Sumatran tiger cubs seized recently in the area were from animals killed by pig hunters. The association will hold a mass pig hunt and demonstration of pig baiting with dogs at a festival on 12 December 2004. The hunt, arranged in conjunction with the Pesta Danau Kerinci festival, is supported by the Kerinci district government, but has dismayed local NGOs as the festival is intended to promote the area as an eco-tourism destination. Sumatran conservationists working on tiger conservation in Kerinci district are concerned because the case of the two tigers cubs suggests that pig hunters are operating outside the rules and without control. Encouraging large organized pig hunts and pig baiting is not going to help develop nature tourism in Kerinci, and whilst hunting groups are unsupervised and do not operate

within the guidelines, they are a threat to rare animals in and around the Park.

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New and improved internet resources

The *International Association for Bear Research and Management* (<http://www.bearbiology.com/>) is a volunteer, not-for-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of all species of bears. The website offers links to information about, and abstracts from, *Ursus*, the primary scientific publication of the Association. The site contains an interesting collection of documents, including the US and Russia Polar Bear Treaty, a June 2004 letter from IBA President Harry V. Reynolds to the Mongolian Minister of Nature and Environment regarding the Gobi Bear Recovery Plan, and descriptions of all eight bear species.

Many remember the environmental disaster that resulted from the Exxon Valdez oil spill in the Gulf of Alaska. One positive outcome of the tragedy is the *Gulf of Alaska Ecosystem Monitoring and Research Programme* (<http://www.evostc.state.ak.us/gem/>), which is administered by the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, formed to oversee restoration of the injured ecosystem through the use of the \$900 million civil settlement.

Created by the World Rainforest Movement in 1995, *FERN* (Forests and the European Union Resource Network; <http://www.fern.org>) promotes the

conservation and sustainable use of forests and respect for the rights of forest peoples in the policies and practices of the European Union. The website contains summaries of current FERN campaigns as well as links to news articles regarding Poverty and EC Aid, Forest Peoples, EU Forests and Trade, and access to an extensive assortment of publications.

The USGS *Pacific Island Ecosystems Research Center* (<http://biology.usgs.gov/pierc/>) provides research, baseline information and technical assistance relating to conservation and restoration of indigenous biological resources occurring within the cultural, sociological and political context of the States and Islands Territories of Hawaii, Guam, Truk, the Marianas Islands, American Samoa and others under the US jurisdiction in the Pacific Basin. The website contains an extensive annotated bibliography, links to information about Field Station Projects under various categories including Hawaiian Birds Projects, Wild Life Health, Ecosystem and Biological Diversity, and Molecular Genetics.

The *Global Amphibian Assessment* (<http://www.globalamphibians.org/index.html>) is a comprehensive assessment of the conservation status of the world's 5,753 known species of frogs, toads, salamanders and caecilians. The website presents results of the assessments, including IUCN Red List threat category, range map, ecology, and other data for every amphibian species, and the Assessment database is searchable.

Hosted by Harvard University, the *Ecology WWW Page* (<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~brach/Ecology-WWW.html>) is an extensive list of hyperlinked, ecology-related resources and organizations. A wide variety of websites can be located by browsing a 14-part alphabetical list, or by using a keyword search.