

International**Protected area coverage improving but still far from complete**

Conservation planners often use the figure of 10% as a target for protected area coverage for biomes, countries and even the planet. The new World Database on Protected Areas shows that terrestrial protected area coverage now approaches 12% worldwide. Whether the establishment of new protected areas should cease given that the 10% target has been surpassed needs a global gap analysis. Given the new datasets available it can be shown that protected area coverage varies geographically, but is less than 2% in some bioregions, and more than 12% of the world's bird, mammal, amphibian and turtle species are wholly unrepresented. Thus the global protected area systems are far from complete.

Source: *BioScience* (2004), 54(12), 1081–1091.

Free trade may not be good for forests

It has been suggested that free trade in forestry products may be good for forests but a recent study has shown that the effect of lowering tariffs on forestry imports in Indonesia and Thailand has made it easier to export logs from Indonesia. In the 1960s and 1970s the Philippines exported logs, but they depleted their resources and by the 1990s were importing logs. With the scarcity of high value wood, Filipino plywood producers turned to lower quality wood from trees planted by domestic farmers. Trees planted to meet the demand benefited the environment. After international pressure, the Philippines reduced its tariff on plywood imports from 50% in 1995 to 20% in 1997, making domestic production uncompetitive and reducing the incentive for farmers to plant trees. A similar situation exists in Thailand. Indonesia still has natural forests and exports billions of dollars worth of forest products each year but its forests are disappearing fast. During the late 1990s the government reduced taxes

on log exports which may have stimulated greater logging. It is argued that governments should use trade measures and other forestry policies to encourage reforestation and avoid destroying natural forests, and that the World Trade Organization should treat forestry products differently from industrial or agricultural products.

Source: *Ecological Economics* (2004), 50, 23–34.

Albatrosses travel round the world in 46 days

An 18-month study by the British Antarctic Survey has identified the year-round habitat of the grey-headed albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma*. Most of the birds studied travelled from their breeding sites off the coast of South Georgia to areas of the south-west Indian Ocean. Over half then made round-the-world journeys, the fastest in just 46 days. The results of this work will be important when dealing with the issue of the massive declines in albatross species through the effects of longlining. By understanding where these birds go when they are not breeding, it will be possible to brief governments and fisheries to impose stricter measures capable of reducing the number of birds killed by 75–95%.

Source: [Http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/01/grey-headed_albatross.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/01/grey-headed_albatross.html)

Debate continues over the value of protecting biodiversity hotspots

Much attention has recently focused on the conservation of so-called biodiversity hotspots – areas where the greatest number of species are under imminent threat. A recent book by Conservation International, *Hotspots Revisited*, has produced a revised list of 34 hotspots that cover just 2.3% of the earth's surface but are home to 50% of the world's endemic plant species and 42% of endemic land vertebrates. This revised list includes areas not previously classified as hotspots, such as Japan and the Madrean pine-oak woodlands of Mexico and the south-western US. Other scientists continue to question the emphasis on endemic-rich areas that results in more attention for the species-rich tropics and subtropics while less diverse but no less distinctive areas in the Arctic and temperate regions are overlooked. In the end the debate will be over whether it is better to conserve the largest numbers of species or the

most representative cross-section of the world's biodiversity.

Source: *New Scientist* (2005), 185(2485), 10–11.

Advisory Group formed to tackle overharvesting of medicinal and aromatic plants

An estimated 40,000 to 50,000 plant species are used in traditional and modern medicine systems throughout the world and many medicinal and aromatic plants are being overharvested. To counteract this problem, an international Advisory Group has been established in order to involve relevant stakeholders from ecological, socio-economic and fair trade sectors in the development and testing of standards and criteria. The first expert workshop was held in December 2004 on the Isle of Vlim, Germany and resulted in a preliminary draft of the Standards and Criteria document. A testing phase of draft standards in field projects is scheduled to take place in mid 2005 and this will complement the theoretical discussion and test the relevance and feasibility of the practice standards and performance criteria under development.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2005), 23, 3.

Fisheries failing to safeguard seabirds

BirdLife International has published the first review ranking the environmental performance of the world's 19 inter-governmental Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). The RFMOs of chief concern are the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna, and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna. These organizations are doing little or nothing to reduce the bycatch of seabirds, sharks and turtles in their fisheries, while at the same time many of their fish stocks have declined by more than 90%. More than 300,000 seabirds, including 100,000 albatrosses, and thousands of marine mammals and turtles are killed by both legal and illegal longline fishing fleets every year.

Source: [Http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/03/rfmos.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/03/rfmos.html)

Millennium Ecosystem Assessment paints bleak picture

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment is a 4-year study designed by a partnership of UN agencies, international scientific organizations and development agencies, with guidance from the private

sector and civil society groups. It involves 1,360 scientists from 95 countries. The study shows that c. two-thirds of the ecosystem services that support life on earth are being degraded or used unsustainably. If this trend continues there is an increased likelihood of serious impacts such as the emergence of new diseases, sudden changes in water quality, creation of 'dead zones' along the coasts, the collapse of fisheries, and shifts in regional climate. The findings of this study have been backed by eight of the world's leading conservation organizations.

Source: [Http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/03/mea.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/03/mea.html)

Untamed rivers of the world are becoming extinct

Most of the world's big river systems, including the 20 largest and the eight most biologically diverse, now have dams on them. This is the conclusion of a systematic study of almost 300 of the world's largest river systems. Most of the remaining wild rivers are in the Arctic tundra and northern boreal forests. The eight rivers that run through the largest variety of ecosystems – the Amazon, Orinoco, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Zambezi, Amur, Yenisei and Indus – are all extensively dammed. Many arid parts of the world have no untamed river systems and regulating the flow in such rivers may be especially damaging to ecosystems. Virgin river systems that are under threat include the Rajang in Malaysian Borneo, the Jequitinhonha in Brazil and the Cá in Vietnam. Damming creates huge reservoirs that in some cases can hold back a river's entire annual flow. In Turkey reservoirs on the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates could shut down the entire flow of both rivers into Iraq and Iran and the Gulf for more than a year.

Source: *New Scientist* (2005), 186(2496), 10.

New species develop faster on remote islands

A study of arthropod and flowering plant species on the Canary and Hawaiian Islands has shown that islands with the richest variety of species for their size also have the largest proportion of endemic species. The number of endemics is a good indicator of how fast new species have developed on an island. It is known that plants and animals that reach remote islands are often able to occupy vacant ecological niches and develop into new species but

this study shows that new species arise faster on the most biodiverse islands. The study has implications for conservation because it shows that to maintain species diversity it is essential to maintain a system that can also generate diversity.

Source: *New Scientist* (2005), 186(2496), 15.

Europe

Plans for assessment of amphibians, reptiles and freshwater fishes of the Mediterranean

Threats to freshwater ecosystems are less well understood than those facing terrestrial habitats but there are signs that the situation is equally as serious. In December 2004 a group of 60 experts gathered for a workshop at the IUCN's Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation in Malaga, Spain, to finalize assessments of the 108 species of amphibians and 370 species of reptiles recorded in this region, and to develop a population assessment for 249 freshwater fish species endemic to the Mediterranean. These results will feed into the global assessments being made by IUCN for major taxonomic groups.

Source: [Http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/news/ebulletin2005/ebulletinjan05.htm](http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/news/ebulletin2005/ebulletinjan05.htm)

WWF calls on Baltic Sea states to act to avoid oil spills

On 19 November 2002 the oil tanker *Prestige* sank off the Spanish coast after drifting erratically for 6 days. The resulting oil spill was estimated to have killed 300,000 seabirds. Two years on from that disaster, WWF is urging Baltic Sea states to develop joint measures to prevent similar spills in the Baltic Sea. The entire Baltic Sea, apart from Russian territorial waters, was designated as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area in 2004 and this designation, if adopted by International Maritime Organization Member States in 2005, will enable protective measures to avoid oil spills to be developed. WWF is urging Baltic Sea states to implement a traffic separation scheme and a vessel traffic monitoring system. WWF is also proposing a compulsory pilotage scheme be introduced to the Danish Straits.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2005), 50(1), 5.

Norway prepares to cull more wolves

In 2001 there was widespread condemnation of Norway's decision to cull eight wolves from a total population of 25. Norway is now preparing for another cull. The total Norwegian wolf population is 20 and the species is listed as Endangered. Despite this there are plans to kill five wolves. The culling has been triggered by concerns over the loss of livestock to wolves. However, conservationists point out that in 2004 only 544 sheep were killed by wolves compared to 100,000 that die through other factors. In summer 2004 the Parliament agreed the goals for the wolf population in Norway; the goal is small, to allow three annual breedings inside a tiny area close to the border with Sweden. Over the years this area of wolf protection has been steadily falling.

Source: [Http://www.prweb.com/releases/2005/1/prweb196191.htm](http://www.prweb.com/releases/2005/1/prweb196191.htm)

Jelka-Rimakåbbå forest in Sweden is finally protected

Jelka-Rimakåbbå is part of one of Sweden's largest unfragmented old-growth forest landscapes, covering 1,500 km² of forests, wetlands, lakes and treeless mountains in the municipality of Jokkmokk in the north of the country. The forest contains typical taiga species such as Siberian jay, golden eagle, brown bear and wolverine. Jelka-Rimakåbbå has been under increasing threat of logging. In January 2005, the forest was designated as a Natura 2000 site which gives it strong legal protection. The area protected does include small areas of young pine and exotic lodgepole pine plantations which will need to be the focus of active restoration projects. The good news about Jelka-Rimakåbbå comes at a time when many politicians and forest industry representatives have been actively campaigning against the protection of more old-growth forest in northern Sweden.

Source: *Taiga News* (2005), 50, 8.

Long-term fears over seabird populations in the UK

In 2004, several seabird species suffered their worst breeding year on record. On Orkney, for example, kittiwakes failed to rear any young while guillemots suffered a total breeding failure on Fair Isle and raised only a few chicks on other Shetland islands. The most likely cause of this mass failure was climate change – 2004 was the second warmest on record in Scotland. Changing climate has led to

a fundamental change in the plankton mix in the North Sea which in turn has impacted on sand eels, a major food source for many seabirds. There are calls for control on sand eel fishing to help seabirds though others argue that it is increasing herring stocks that are having an impact on sand eels. There are worries that 2004 may not be a one-off and that in the long-term seabirds could be under considerable threat.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2005), 23(3), 30.

Drastic measures needed to save UK fishing industry

A report by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution recommends that 30% of UK waters should be turned into marine reserves and closed to commercial fishing in order to save the UK fishing industry. The report recommends that deep-sea trawling taking place in UK waters or being carried out by UK vessels be stopped immediately. The UK should also adopt a decommissioning scheme to reduce the capacity of the UK fishing fleet to an environmentally sustainable level. It is thought that half of the fish landed by the UK fleet under the current quota system comes from sources that are unsustainable or borderline. The UK's Fisheries Minister Ben Bradshaw has said that it would be premature to implement these radical measures but he does not rule out doing so in the future.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2005), 20(2), 47.

UK birds trapped illegally for export

An estimated 2,000 wild finches and buntings are being caught in the UK each year for the European bird-keeping trade. The species targeted are prized for their colourful plumage and include yellowhammers *Emberiza citrinella*, bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* and bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla*. Birds from the UK are destined for countries such as Belgium and Malta where demand cannot be satisfied from birds bred legally in captivity. Birds are being trapped using bird lime, which involves smearing glue on twigs and bird tables, and by using seeds and caged birds as lures. Nets and spring-loaded traps are also used.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2005), 20(2), 56.

Ban on maerl extraction

Maerl is made up of calcified seaweeds that accumulate over thousands of years

to form highly biodiverse marine deposits. From January 2005 the extraction of maerl is to be licensed. Maerl is rare around England and the best deposits occur around Falmouth in the south-west of the country. Since the 1970s, maerl has been dredged and sold as an organic soil conditioner and liming agent by the Cornish Calcified Seaweed Company. The licensing is seen as a victory for marine conservation and follows a report into the detrimental effects of its extraction on marine life.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2005), 50(2), 121.

Vulture feeding project in France

A project has begun in south-east France to support the recovery of Egyptian vultures whose population has declined by almost 60% in the last 50 years; there are currently only an estimated 16 pairs left in France. Feeding stations have been established in three areas in an attempt to reverse the decline. This strategy was previously used to assist the reintroduction of griffon vultures in other parts of France.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2005), 23(3), 29.

Ministry of Defence releases large areas of land in Gibraltar

In 2004 the Ministry of Defence (MoD) released large areas of land, some of which have already been passed to the Government of Gibraltar. These include the aerial farm at North Front, most of the Rock Gun and Middle Hill area, and the MoD half of the Great Sand Slopes. The aerial farm is an important remnant of the original habitat of the isthmus and some plant species found here are rare in Gibraltar. Rock Gun and Middle Hill is home to the Gibraltar campion that is found nowhere else in the world. This site is also the only area of the Upper Rock Nature Reserve that is virtually free from human disturbance. The Great Sand Slopes is also important for local wildlife but, unlike the other two sites, is not currently threatened by development.

Source: *Gibraltar Nature News* (2005), 9, 5.

Huge seizure of illegal wildlife products in Malta

On 19 January 2005 customs officials at Malta International Airport seized 500 animal skins in what was one of the largest hauls involving illicit wildlife trade in the country. The cargo was being

transported in four suitcases from Cairo, Egypt via Italy, and had been abandoned in the airport. It consisted of animal carcasses including egrets, eagles, ducks, a kingfisher as well as an Egyptian mongoose *Herpestes ichneumon* and a jungle cat *Felis chaus*. It is thought that the smugglers had a short connection time at the airport and the cargo never made it onto their flight. Realizing they could be in trouble, they never reported the lost baggage to the airline.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2005), 20(2), 83.

North Eurasia

Shell agrees to re-route oil pipeline off Sakhalin Island

The oil company Shell has agreed to re-route a controversial oil pipeline off Russia's east coast, apparently following pressure from environmental campaigners. But campaigners say that the pipeline is not the problem, it is the oil platforms. It is believed that the feeding grounds of the Critically Endangered western gray whale near Sakhalin Island may be threatened by the USD 12 billion Sakhalin II development. In March 2005 the Sakhalin Energy Investment Company (SEIC), of which Royal Dutch Shell is the main stakeholder, agreed to re-route the pipeline to avoid the feeding grounds. But whale experts have criticised the SEIC for providing insufficient information about alternative locations for oil platforms and recommended that these should be placed as far from the shore as possible to reduce noise and oil spill risks.

Source: *New Scientist* (2005) 186(2494), 4.

FSC-certification in the Samarga watershed in Russia

The Samarga watershed in the Russian Far East is a roadless, high conservation value forest that is home to the Udege people and Amur tigers. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has certified the company Terneyles for their operations in Primorsky Krai, including the Samarga watershed. However, the certification documentation notes several non-conformations with the FSC standard, including conclusion of agreements with local communities. In the meantime, seven environmental NGOs have signed an agreement with Terneyles to conduct an inventory of

a large part of the Samarga watershed to identify areas that must be protected from logging. The company has agreed not to log or build roads in the area until the inventory is completed.

Source: *Taiga News* (2005), 50, 3.

North Africa and Middle East

Classic field guide available online in Arabic

The *Field Guide to the Birds of the Middle East* by Porter, Christensen and Schiermacker-Hansen is the only complete guide to the region and has now been translated into Arabic and is available online from the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature website in Jordan. It is hoped that the translation, undertaken by Dr Saeed A. Mohamed in Bahrain, will encourage a greater understanding and appreciation of birds throughout the Arab-speaking world. It is now possible that national field guides can be produced in Arabic, and this may be of particular value in Iraq for build-ing conservation capacity. It is hoped that the Canadian Government, who are already involved in conservation activities in Iraq, will support the publication of a field guide to Iraq's birds.

Source: http://www.birdlife.net/news/news/2005/01/mid_east_guide.html

Arabian oryx to be reintroduced in Jordan

In March 2005 five Arabian oryx were released into the wild in the Wadi Rum reserve in Jordan as a test run for their permanent release later in the year. Ten Arabian oryx were originally transferred from the Shumari reserve, 12 km south of Azraq, to Wadi Rum in 2002 as part of a joint project between the Aqaba Special Economic Authority and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature. However, only six of the original 10 remain with four animals lost due to bad weather conditions and illness. There are captive Arabian oryx populations in Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, with wild populations now established in the Uruq Bani, Ma'arid protected area in Saudi Arabia and the Jiddat Al Harasis in Oman.

Source: *Jordan Times* (2005), 23 February.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Africa's protected areas face funding shortfall

It is estimated that USD 300 million is required each year to manage and protect Africa's more than 1,200 protected areas, according to a meeting of protected area managers and experts held in Nairobi, Kenya in February 2005. There is a huge challenge to reconcile the sustainable management of Africa's natural resources with pressing development needs. The threats to protected areas is compounded by the inadequate allocation of financial resources in national budgets and the global benefits that the protection of Africa's protected areas bring has not attracted adequate funding from the international community. The long-term benefits of investment in conserving biodiversity has been shown. For example, in Madagascar, for every USD 1 invested in conserving the island's rich biodiversity, USD 2 has been generated for sustainable development.

Source: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/02/africa_pa_shortfall.html

New Ramsar site in Tanzania

The Rufiji-Mafia-Kilwa wetland has become Tanzania's fourth Ramsar site. The newly protected area covers the delta of the Rufiji River, Mafia Island and surrounding area, and the Songo-Songo Archipelago to the south with adjacent waters, including the Mafia Channel and waters between Mafia and Songo-Songo. The Rufiji River delta is the largest in East Africa and contains the biggest estuarine mangrove forest on the eastern seaboard of the continent.

Source: *Africa Geographic* (2005), 13(3), 18.

Lowland gorillas successfully reintroduced in Republic of Congo

In 2003 the John Aspinall Foundation (JAF), in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Congo, released five western lowland gorillas into a new reserve, 50 years after they last inhabited the region. The first study since the reintroduction shows that all the individuals are doing well and, even more significantly, a baby was born to two of the reintroduced animals in March 2004. The animals were reintroduced to the 100 km² Lefini Reserve where illegal hunting remains a concern. As a result, JAF has worked closely with local

communities and employed 50 staff to guard and monitor the reintroduced animals. In another JAF project 14 gorillas have been released into Bateke Plateau National Park in Gabon.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2005), 23(4), 30.

New antelope described from Democratic Republic of Congo

In 1926 and during 1947–48, 35 museum specimens of an undescribed antelope species were collected. Following comparative analyses of morphological characters, a new antelope species, the Upemba lechwe *Kobus anselli*, has now been formally described. This species is restricted to the Upemba wetlands, Kamalondo depression and south-east Congo basin (Katanga Province, Democratic Republic of Congo). Commercial poaching has reduced the population of this species from c. 20,000 in the 1980s to under 1,000 today. The belated discovery of the Upemba lechwe emphasizes the region's conservation significance. Katanga is a biodiversity hotspot whose continued survival depends on reducing adverse human impact and maintaining the integrity of the wetland habitat. A regional conservation strategy should encompass the landscape mosaic and include neighbouring drainage systems. A trans-frontier conservation area would consolidate the protected areas and land use systems of the region in an ecological context.

Source: *Journal of Zoology, London* (2005), 265, 113–132.

Hunting could be increasing pressure on bonobos

Recent studies have suggested that there has been a significant decline in bonobo populations in Central Africa. A new survey of the 3,600 km² Lomako forest in the Democratic Republic of Congo found more bonobos than expected but, because their distribution was a lot patchier than before, there were fewer actual nest sites, so the bonobos were more difficult to find. It is suggested that widespread hunting in the areas where bonobos live is forcing the animals to move around, having a very negative effect on their population structure and social ecology. There are also worries that just by studying bonobos, researchers can unintentionally lead hunters to the apes because of the trails that they create. It is argued, however, that if researchers had not been present in an

area, bonobos would have been hunted anyway.

Source: *New Scientist* (2005), 185(2485), 16.

Isolated gorilla population survives war and poachers

An isolated population of rare Grauer's gorillas living among rebel armies and bands of poachers in the mountain highlands of Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo has managed to survive thanks to a heroic defence by a group of park guards. A recent census by the Wildlife Conservation Society counted 168 gorillas and noted that several groups had infants. A previous count under difficult conditions in 2000 estimated 120–130 animals in the same area.

Source: *Africa Geographic* (2005), 13(3), 19.

Emergency transfer of northern white rhino is approved

On 13th January 2005, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo approved a strategy for the translocation of five northern white rhino *Ceratotherium simum cottoni* from Garamba National Park to a wildlife sanctuary in Kenya. The northern white rhino is Critically Endangered and found only in Garamba National Park. Despite decades of instability in this region, the rhinos have managed to survive thanks to the joint efforts of the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature and their NGO partners. However, a rapid escalation of commercial poaching in the last 18 months has brought the rhino population down to probably less than 10 individuals.

Source: [Http://www.fauna-flora.org/docs/pr_whiterhino_jan_18_05.pdf](http://www.fauna-flora.org/docs/pr_whiterhino_jan_18_05.pdf)

Unilever signs deal to develop dieting aids containing extracts of Hoodia

Hoodia gordonii is a succulent plant species found in southern Africa that has been used by the San people, particularly the Khwe, Xu and Khomani tribes, to suppress hunger when food is scarce or when hunting. The global consumer products company Unilever has signed a potential GBP 21 million (USD 40 million) deal with Phytopharm for the commercial rights to develop a new range of dieting aids that contain extracts of *Hoodia*. A benefit-sharing agreement has been set up between the San and the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. Funds received by

the San would be spent on education and buying back land that historically belonged to them. A proposal to list *Hoodia* species on CITES Appendix II was adopted at the 13th Conference of the Parties in October 2004 with an exemption for specimens labelled as being produced through controlled harvesting and production.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2005), 20(2), 56.

Concern over online sales of great white shark body parts

The theft of a famously large set of great white shark jaws from fishery premises in Gansbaai, South Africa has fuelled speculation that the item is destined for sale online, where it may attract bids of up to USD 50,000. In 2004, the great white shark was listed on Appendix II of CITES with the result that trade would only be allowed under a system of permits. But the unregulated selling of shark body parts continues. In the UK, for example, the sale of great white shark teeth remains legal because the European Union has yet to implement the CITES listing. There has also been evidence of great white shark teeth, along with leopard skins and ivory products, being offered for sale on the online auction site eBay.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2005), 23(5), 31.

Regulations to prohibit 'canned hunting' in South Africa may have negative impact

There has been an increase in the practice of so-called 'canned hunting' where trophy animals such as lions and leopards are bred in captivity and then released into a fenced area where they can be legally shot. On 1 July 2005 a law will come into force that will ban canned hunting in South Africa but there are concerns that this will make it possible to hunt predators that were previously off limits, such as cheetahs and wild dogs. Under the new regulations it will be possible to hunt a captive-bred predator provided it is not in captivity when it is hunted and that it has been living at its release site for at least 6 months and is deemed to be 'wild'. Critics argue that no hand-reared lion could be classed as 'wild' after being fed by humans for 6 months and that not in captivity could merely mean being in another enclosure.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2005), 23(5), 30.

South and South-east Asia

Important Bird Areas in Asia are not well protected

A new publication *Important Bird Areas in Asia* produced by BirdLife International has shown that of the 2,293 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified, 976 sites are unprotected and a further 325 are only partially protected. In Malaysia, 55 IBAs have been identified, covering an area of 50,994 km², but only 21 are protected and eight partially protected. The book warns that one in eight of the region's 2,700 bird species are threatened with extinction unless the IBAs are adequately protected and managed.

Source: *Malaysian Naturalist* (2005), 58(3), 11.

Animals sensed impending Asian tsunami

There are now many stories of how animals were able to sense the coming Asian tsunami that caused so much loss of human life on 26 December 2004. One particularly interesting example was from the Thai resort of Khao Lak. Elephants being used to give joyrides to tourists began to make a strange wailing sound at the time of the earthquake. A few minutes later, and before the tsunami struck, the elephants headed for higher ground and others broke their chains and followed; all ended up safe but 6,000 humans were killed by the wave. In the Andaman and Nicobar Islands local tribes escaped the effects of the tsunami because they heeded warning signals from animals such as changes in bird calls.

Source: *The Straits Times* (2005), 10 January.

Hydroelectric scheme in India threatens Asian elephant corridor

A major 2,000 MW hydroelectric project planned for the Subansiri river, a tributary of the Brahmaputra threatens an important corridor for Asian elephants. The scheme at Gerukamukh will affect the Dhemaji district of Assam and parts of Papum Pure and Lower Subansiri districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The wildlife corridor links the animals of Dhemaji and the foothills region of Siang district with those of forests in the Lakhimpur and Papum Pare districts. This corridor has already narrowed following road developments and expansion of human habitation and tea plantations and there

is an increased risk of human-elephant conflict.

Source: *The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India Newsletter* (2004), 6, 27.

Sandalwood trade to be tracked by satellite

Sandalwood *Santalum album* is a valuable tree, and trade in the timber is one of the most lucrative in India. Southern India is home to the last sizeable sandalwood forests in the world, which are spread across the states of Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. As a result of the trade, the sandalwood forests are dwindling. In the state of Kerala, there were 62,000 sandalwood trees in Marayur forest in 2001; by 2004 this figure had fallen to 55,000. To monitor the remaining sandalwood populations, the Forest Department of the State of Kerala is planning to plant satellite tracking devices inside the trees. Under this plan microchips will be embedded inside trees, which will allow officials to detect any attempt to cut them down as well as trace the movements of any smugglers who try to take timber out of the area.

Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2005), 20(2), 50.

Second breeding centre for Asia's threatened vultures

Work is beginning in West Bengal on a second captive breeding centre for three Asian species of *Gyps* vulture that have declined dramatically in recent years because of the impact of the veterinary drug diclofenac. Four more breeding centres are planned. Meanwhile, 44 birds, equal numbers of Indian and white-rumped vultures *Gyps indicus* and *G. bengalensis* have been brought to the first captive breeding centre in Haryana, India. But no slender-billed vultures *G. tenuirostris*, the most threatened of the three, are yet in captivity and there are grave concerns that time is running out, especially for this species. It is thought that viable breeding populations of white-rumped and Indian vultures could be established within 18 months if resources and efforts are coordinated. Vultures only start breeding at 4 or 5 years of age and raise at best one young per year so the recovery programme will probably take at least 15 years.

Source: <http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/03/vultures.html>

Myanmar joins Ramsar Convention

In December 2004 Myanmar became the 143rd Contracting Party to the Ramsar

Convention. The country has also designated its first Ramsar site, the Moyingyi Wildlife Sanctuary, which is a site for threatened waterbirds including Baer's pochard *Aythya baeri* and sarus crane *Grus antigone*.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2005), 27(1), 7.

Malaysian tigers may be a separate subspecies

A genetic analysis has revealed that tigers in the Malaysian Peninsula are substantially different from those elsewhere in Asia and may represent a new subspecies. The study looked at blood and tissue samples from 134 tigers captured in locations across Asia and concluded that the Indo-Chinese subspecies *Panthera tigris corbetti*, believed to be a single group of c. 1,700 cats, is in fact two subspecies – the Malayan tiger, found on the Malaysian Peninsula, and the northern Indo-Chinese tiger, found in areas ranging from Myanmar to the extreme south-west of China. There are estimated to be 800–1,000 Malayan tigers and a roughly similar number of northern Indo-Chinese tigers left in the wild, and the results of this study will mean that conservationists will have to consider managing each subspecies as a unique population.

Source: *International Zoo News* (2005), 52(2(339)), 104–105.

Wild population of Critically Endangered turtle found in Palawan

Until recently the Critically Endangered Philippine forest turtle *Heosemys leytenis* was known only from museum collections. Despite numerous attempts no wild populations had been found. However, during a survey on the island of Palawan in the Philippines, nine adult Philippine forest turtles were collected in and around freshwater swamps and slow-moving streams within the municipality of Taytay. The species appears to be rare or cryptic in some areas, but common in others. There does not appear to be a major demand for turtle meat amongst local communities but the biggest threat to the survival is uncontrolled logging and agricultural encroachment. There is also a threat from international trade, where demand for a rediscovered species would be high. Based on literature available and past surveys, it appears that the Philippine forest turtle is confined to Palawan.

Source: *Turtle and Tortoise Newsletter* (2004), 8, 2–3.

East Asia

Illegal wildlife trade campaign receives support of the Dalai Lama

In Tibet illegal wildlife trade is an increasing problem. In 2004 a single shipment intercepted by Tibetan enforcement officers contained 32 tiger, 579 leopard and 665 otter skins. Tibetans living in India and Nepal have become increasingly involved in illegal wildlife trafficking. Tiger and snow leopard skins and bones are amongst the items smuggled from India to Nepal and into Tibet from where they are sent to China to supply the food and medicine trade. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is supporting a conservation education and awareness campaign established by the UK-based Care for the Wild International and the Wildlife Trust of India. The project involves distributing a film featuring a message from HH the Dalai Lama. This film will be shown in Tibetan schools and refugee camps across India, at public gatherings and will be disseminated through local cable and radio channels, monasteries and at Buddhist festivals.

Source: <http://www.careforthewild.org/newsstory.asp?apid=70>

China's new Red List is published

In 2004 a new Red List for China was published. This was compiled by a core group of 19 Chinese scientists using the latest Red List Categories and Criteria from IUCN. The Red List replaces earlier assessments such as the China Red Books. In all, 5,803 animal species and 4,408 plant species were assessed for their status. The results will eventually be available on the internet at www.chinabiodiversity.com.

Source: *Living Forests* (2005), 9, 10.

Critically Endangered box turtle is in fact three different species

The Indochinese box turtle *Cuora galbinifrons* is Critically Endangered but a recent mitochondrial DNA study has suggested that the three previously recognised subspecies, *C. g. galbinifrons*, *C. g. bourreti* and *C. g. picturata*, themselves all Critically Endangered, are in fact separate species. This will have important consequences for the species' conservation. A fourth subspecies *C. g. hainanensis*, recorded from the island of Hainan, has diverged rather little from the parent species. Little mitochondrial DNA variation was found among the

morphologically distinct species *Cuora aurocapitata*, *C. pani* and *C. trifasciata*.
Source: *Living Forests* (2005), 9, 11.

Concern over dolphin bycatch in Taiwanese waters

It is estimated that between 25,000 and 40,000 dolphins and whales are caught in driftnets in Taiwanese waters every year. The International Cetacean Bycatch Taskforce committee indicates that there are lots of net fisheries off Taiwan but no monitoring of bycatch. It is believed that fishermen still harpoon cetaceans illegally for food and covert sales. Taiwan is not a member of the International Whaling Commission and does not undertake whaling operations. Under Taiwanese law all cetaceans are protected. Some government money is spent on the rescue of stranded cetaceans, while other funding assesses the impact of whale-watching. But these activities will be irrelevant if the bycatch rate is not reduced.

Source: *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2005), 23(4), 30.

Semangeum reclamation project is halted

The Saemangeum Reclamation Project in South Korea has been controversial because of the destruction of the tidal-flat ecosystem in the area. In early February 2005 Seoul Administrative Court ruled that work to complete the seawall that is part of this project should stop immediately. The 40,000 ha of intertidal mudflats at Saemangeum supports the livelihoods of an estimated 25,000 people and is internationally important for migrant waders and other waterbirds. The court said that it was necessary to cancel or change the permit to reclaim the public water area because of the huge irreversible environmental, ecological and economic damage that could be expected. The court also recommended that the government halt the project and establish an expert committee to review the potential economic and environmental consequences of reclamation.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2005), 27(1), 10.

North America

Canada to allow increase in quota of polar bears that can be legally killed

In January 2005 Canadian authorities agreed to allow an annual quota of 518

polar bears to be killed by indigenous people and sports hunters in Canada, a 29% increase on the figure for 2004. The increase was agreed after petitions from indigenous hunters who said they had observed more bears this year than in recent years. However, some researchers argue that the quotas are not based on the best available scientific data and are being set without proper consultation with experts in other countries. Officials argue that scientific studies were considered and that traditional Inuit knowledge about population size deserves more trust that it has had in the past.

Source: *Nature* (2005), 434(7034), 688.

Manufacturers of Kleenex are targeted by conservationists

Kimberly-Clark is the largest manufacturer of tissue products in the world, including the well-known brand of Kleenex toilet tissue. The company is the target of a campaign to stop them clearcutting ancient boreal forests to create disposable tissue products. Kimberly-Clark produces 3.7 million tonnes of tissues annually, and most of their products for sale in North American shops are made from 100% virgin tree fibre, with less than 20% of its total production coming from recycled sources. Greenpeace Canada is urging consumers to choose ancient forest-friendly alternatives and to contact Kimberly-Clark to ask them to change their pulp sourcing policies.

Source: *Taiga News* (2005), 50, 2.

Canada unveils its latest National Park

The Torngat Mountains National Park in northern Labrador is Canada's 42nd national park. It was made possible by the recent signing of the Labrador Inuit Land Claim Agreement and an agreement between the federal government and the Newfoundland and Labrador governments to transfer the land from the province to Canada. The new park includes rugged granite mountains, deep fjords and large areas of low Arctic tundra. The park will help to protect the globally unique population of tundra-dwelling black bears and much of the range of the George river caribou herd that currently numbers *c.* 700,000 animals.

Source: *Nature Canada* (2005), 34(1), 9.

Dumped oil rigs are havens for marine life

In the 1990s Greenpeace voiced serious concerns about the dumping of old oil

platforms in the deep ocean. However, a report in April 2005 suggested that disused oil platforms could become havens for marine life – at least in the warm, shallow waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The Eco-Endurance Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana argues that in the calcium-rich waters of the gulf, corals rapidly colonize the rigs and the platforms create reef habitat that would otherwise not exist over tens of thousands of square miles. In the US old rigs must be brought ashore unless they are retained through a 'Rigs to reefs' programme introduced in the late 1990s; however, only tens of the thousands of decommissioned rigs have been retained under this programme. While accepting that some rigs may be useful as artificial reefs, Greenpeace UK argue that all platforms should come ashore initially.

Source: *New Scientist* (2005), 186(2495), 7.

Ivory-billed woodpecker rediscovered in Arkansas

The ivory-billed woodpecker *Campephilus principalis*, long suspected to be extinct, has been rediscovered in the Big Woods region of eastern Arkansas. Visual encounters during 2004 and 2005, and analysis of a video clip from April 2004, confirm the existence of at least one male. Acoustic signatures consistent with *Campephilus* display-drums have also been heard from the region. Extensive efforts to locate birds away from the primary site remain unsuccessful but potential habitat for a thinly distributed source population is vast (over 220,000 ha).

Source: [Http://www.birds.cornell.edu/ivory](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/ivory)

New York approves historic endangered species law

On 1 December 2004 Mayor Bloomberg of New York City signed a historic law that makes it illegal to buy or sell products containing, or advertised as containing, endangered species. New York is the first municipality in the US to approve such a law. The move follows an investigation of New York City's traditional medicine shops that was undertaken by TRAFFIC North America in the spring of 2004. The investigation found that illegal products claiming to contain endangered species, including tigers, rhinos, leopards and musk deer were widely available in the city. The US Endangered Species Act prohibits interstate commerce in endangered species but it does not apply to sales within a city.

Source: *TRAFFIC Dispatches* (2005), 23, 5.

Company forced to create artificial reef following illegal dumping incident

In the US, Bean Stuyvesant L.L.C. violated the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, commonly known as the Ocean Dumping Act, by illegally dumping 2,800 m³ of dredged rock outside designated disposal areas on two occasions. As well as being fined \$16,000, the company also agreed to undertake a supplemental environmental project valued at \$104,000 to place materials into a federally authorized New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection artificial reef site located c. 6 nautical miles offshore from Long Beach Island. This additional material will create artificial reefs that enhance the fisheries and diversity of species in New Jersey's coastal waters. At least 1,300 tons of hollow concrete material will be placed by Bean Stuyvesant.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2005), 50(3), 242–243.

Invasive seaweed is controlled in California

The seaweed *Caulerpa taxifolia* is listed as one of the world's top 100 invasive species. It grows as a dense smothering blanket, covering and killing all native vegetation. It is a popular decorative tropical aquarium plant. In the Mediterranean it is thought that the plant originated from fragments that escaped from an aquarium in Monaco. It has recently been found in California but following an eradication programme it is now thought to have been controlled. The eradication method involved using chlorine bleach at concentrations of 125 parts per million for 30 minutes in both the water column and the sediments. This method has to be used very carefully as it can result in indiscriminate deaths. However, following the chlorine bleach application, no new strands of the plant were found in Agua Hedionda Lagoon in Carlsbad or Huntington Harbor in Orange County. State legislature has now also banned the interstate sale and possession of nine species of *Caulerpa*, including *Caulerpa taxifolia*.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2005), 50(3), 241–242.

Po'o-uli close to extinction

The Hawaiian honeycreepers (Family Drepanididae) are one the world's most threatened bird families. Thirteen of the 34 species once known are extinct and a further seven species are Critically

Endangered. Now another honeycreeper, the Po'o-uli *Melamprosops phaeosoma*, is close to extinction with the death in captivity of possibly the world's last individual. The Po'o-uli was only discovered on the island of Maui in 1973 but by mid 1997 only three individuals could be found. Habitat loss and degradation, and the rapid spread of introduced mosquitoes carrying diseases such as avian malaria to which native birds have little resistance, has contributed to the species' decline. The only remaining hope for the species is that new individuals can be located on Maui, although the chances of this happening are remote. Hawaii has been dubbed the Extinction Capital of the World and in recent times 22 bird species have become extinct there. These extinctions have happened largely as a result of a lack of funding for conservation action.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2005), 27(1), 9.

Threatened Laysan teals moved to Midway Atoll

The Laysan teal or Laysan duck *Anas laysanensis* is an endemic Hawaiian dabbling duck that has been federally listed as Endangered since 1967. The birds were extirpated from most of the Hawaiian islands, with a small population of 400–500 remaining on the remote National Wildlife Refuge of Laysan Island. The species is subject to many threats, the most serious of which is from introduced rats. Laysan is currently rat-free but a priority has been to establish additional colonies on other islands. Rats were eliminated from Midway Atoll when the former military base became a wildlife refuge in the 1990s. In October 2004, 20 fledged juvenile birds were moved by ship to Midway and there are plans to move another 30 in 2006. The birds are being monitored via radio telemetry and are adapting well to Midway Atoll.

Source: <http://news.fws.gov/NewsReleases/R1/9319DC55-A9BE-08E1-FDB8C92A7D552686.html>

Central America and Caribbean

Costa Rica passes new fisheries law

On 10 February 2005 Costa Rican senators unanimously approved a new national fisheries law that prohibits

shark finning and creates fines and jail terms for those involved in landing shark fins at Costa Rican ports. The new law also introduces stiff penalties for anyone who harms sea turtles, and requires shrimp fishermen to use Turtle Excluder Devices. The local NGO, PRETOMA, has been closely involved with the drafting of the new legislation but they and many senators oppose parts of the new fisheries law that promote overexploitation of Costa Rica's ocean resources, including free permits for foreign vessels to fish for tuna in Costa Rica's national waters and increased sport fishing.

Source: *Whitley Fund for Nature Newsletter* (2005), 6, 2.

South America

Key remnant of Atlantic forest is protected

The last significant remnant of Atlantic forest in north-eastern Brazil, the Serra do Urubu Important Bird Area, is to be protected by two adjacent nature reserves. The Serra do Urubu is home to 21 endemic bird species, including the Critically Endangered Alagoas foliage-gleaner *Philydor novaesi*, and is divided into the 390 ha Pedra Dantas farm and the 630 ha Frei Caneca Private Nature Reserve created in the 1990s. The local NGO, SAVE Brasil, has now bought Pedra Dantas from its absentee owner. As well as birds, Serra do Urubu is also rich in other biodiversity, with 35 species of mammals, 23 amphibian species, 133 species of ferns and 66 species of orchids. The area is threatened by illegal logging and charcoal burning, fires from surrounding sugar cane fields and encroachment of agriculture.

Source: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/02/serra_do_urubu.html

Parrot is finally described after 100 years

The sulfur-breasted parakeet has been known to scientists for 100 years but it is only now that it has been officially described as a new species, *Aratinga pintoii*. The new species is from the Amazon Basin and is closely related to the sun parakeet. In the past people studying museum specimens mistook the sulfur-breasted parakeet for juvenile sun parakeets. Brazil has more than 1,600 bird species and in the last 20 years more new species have been discovered here

than anywhere else, including the cryptic forest-falcon *Micrastur mintoni*, bald parrot *Pionopsitta aurantiocephala* and Acre antshrike *Thamnophilus divisorius*. Several of the newly described species are in danger of extinction. The conservation status of the sulfur-breasted parakeet has yet to be evaluated.
 Source: http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/03/sulfur-breasted_parakeet.html

UN move may help Galapagos Islands

In April 2005 UN officials visited the Galapagos Islands to decide if the area should be reclassified as endangered, a move that would open the door to grants that would help tackle the serious conservation issues there. The Galapagos Islands are already a World Heritage Site and it is hoped that the threat of reclassification will shame the Ecuadorian government into taking pre-emptive action. But reclassification could affect the fishing and tourism industry, the latter a major revenue earner for the islands. Over the past decade the islands' fishing industry has successfully lobbied to raise fishing quotas and ease restrictions. There are now moves to introduce longlining for tuna and even for the permission to sell any shark fins from fish caught in fishing lines.
 Source: *New Scientist* (2005), 186(2495), 7.

British Birdfair raises record amount of funds for Peru project

The British Birdwatching Fair is an annual event that has been running for 16 years in the UK, and in August 2004 17,500 birdwatchers visited the fair at Rutland Water Nature Reserve. This event raised a record GBP 164,000, which has been donated to BirdLife International's *Saving Northern Peru's Dry Forests* project. North-western Peru contains parts of eight Endemic Bird Areas including the bird-rich Tumbesian Region. The area supports 80 endemic bird species and 21 globally threatened species including the Critically Endangered white-winged guan *Penelope albipennis*. Only 5% of the dry forests or northern Peru remain and the funds

raised from the Fair will allow BirdLife to target conservation action where it is most needed. The 2005 Fair will raise money to help BirdLife save Gurney's pitta *Pitta gurneyi*, found only in peninsular Thailand and adjacent southern Myanmar.

Source: <http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/02/birdfair.html>

Pacific

Samoa is latest Party to CITES

The Independent State of Samoa became the 167th Party to CITES when it deposited its instrument of accession on 9 November 2004. The Convention entered into force for Samoa on 7 February 2005.
 Source: *TRAFFIC Bulletin* (2005), 20(2), 47.

Australia/Antarctica/New Zealand

Stichbirds transferred to mainland New Zealand

In mid February 2005, 30 threatened stichbirds *Notiomystis cincta* were transferred from the predator-free island of Tiritiri Matangi to the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary near Wellington on New Zealand's North Island. A further 30 birds were to be moved in May 2005. The last time this species occurred on the New Zealand mainland was in the 1880s. These transfers are the first step of the Department of Conservation's new 5-year recovery plan for the species. Currently, the only self-sustaining population of stichbirds is found on Little Barrier island, with two other introduced managed populations on Kapiti and Tiritiri Matangi islands.

Source: <http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/01/stichbird.html>

Stoats are tempted by 'rat sausages'

Research has shown that PVC 'rat sausages' show promise as long-life lures to

attract stoats, which are ferocious predators of native birds in New Zealand. Stoats are often attracted to the smell of dead prey such as birds and rats, and researchers aimed to encapsulate the smell of rats within a stable substance. Ground up freeze-dried rats were placed in trap-like tunnels in the open air and these PVC lures remained intact over a period of 20 weeks. Researchers then tried the PVC 'sausages' with a new flavour – 'chemical rat'. Further field trials are needed to get the right combination of attractiveness and longevity in the baits. Stoats were brought to New Zealand in the 1880s and their control is vital for maintaining viable populations of native birds such as kiwis. However, stoats are elusive and difficult to poison or trap. These new lures may be a vital tool in stoat control.

Source: *Forest & Bird* (2005), 315, 9.

Big decline in illegal fishing of Patagonian and Antarctic toothfish

Scientists have reported a dramatic decrease in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing for Patagonian and Antarctic toothfish. The new data were reported at the annual meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. Estimates show that fishing within the area regulated by the commission has decreased by 75%, from 10,070 tons in 2003 to 2,622 tons in 2004.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2005), 50(1), 8.

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