[illegible] found
believed to have
South Atlantic Ocean
150 million years. The fish, of
Chimaera group, is about 30 to 40
cm long and lives at depths of 400-600
metres.

The fish was first discovered on a Spanish fishing boat trawling off the coast of Rio de Janeiro in 2001. Some students taking part in a research project photographed the Chimaera but then, unaware of its importance, threw it back into the sea.

Ichthyologist Jules Soto realised the significance of the discovery while examining the photographs. It took him and his team two years to locate more specimens and to complete the scientific work needed to prove that it was a new species.

The fish was named *Hydrolagus mat-llansi*. It has a snub nose, wing-like side fins, a spiky back fin and stinger tail. It is closely related to sharks and skates. The Chimaera can sense the presence of other animals by scanning the electromagnetic field around it, but it also has large eyes for sensing even the smallest bit of light. Chimaera evolved 400 million years ago during the Devonian Period and are one of the oldest fish species alive today.

STAY OF EXECUTION FOR RARE FORESTS

A recent report by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife stated that many rare afrotemperate forests – of which only a few remain, and most of these are in KZN – are being so heavily exploited by the surrounding rural populations that they are likely to be irreparably damaged or, at worst, disappear completely within about 80 years. These forests are important as they house rare and endangered plants and animals such as the Cape Parrot, Blue Duiker, Tree Dassie and Black Stinkwood tree. They also provide essential services such as potable water for people.

These forests are threatened because they occur in isolated areas where the surrounding communities often have no income or access to building materials and fuel. The answer therefore seemed to be to offer them an alternative to cutting wood from the forests.

A deal was struck with Mondi to provide these communities with free timber that was not suitable for their sawmills. Mondi has already made two deliveries. But this is just a short-term solution – these people should not be left to continue in their poverty cycle and become dependent on donated timber. The next step is to find ways in which they can be empowered without having to overexploit the forests.

NEW STUDY CONDUCTED ON PANDAS

Chinese and American zoologists are conducting the most comprehensive biomedical studies yet on live Giant Pandas in the hope of finding better ways to protect the endangered animal, China's official Xinhua News Agency reported.

A nine-year-old female named Jiaozi, or "dumpling", became the first of 18 pandas to undergo the tests, which include examinations of the animals' stomach, and biopsies to study tissue cells, the report said. Animals were placed under general anaesthetic for the procedures, which were conducted at China's main panda research facility outside the south-western city of Chengdu, Xinhua said. The 10-member team includes zoologists from Atlanta, San Diego and Washington DC, it said.

Zoologists hope test results will yield insights into panda diseases, including infertility, growth problems, para-influenza, hepatitis and murrain – a type of animal plague.

Recently China said the number of pandas counted in the wild had jumped by more than 40 per cent to 1 590 since the early 1990s, adding that scattered habitat and low fertility make breeding difficult.

NEWS 24.COM (Edited by Anthea Jonathan)

WORMS COMBAT TOXIC WASPS THAT THREATEN SA PINES

Microscopic worms are being used to invade the bodies and eggs of wasps in a war to save South Africa's pine plantations and 160 000 jobs.

In KwaZulu-Natal the first 1 200 pine trees have been inoculated in a multimillion-rand programme to raise and spread nematode worms throughout the country's plantations.

"If left unchecked, there will probably be no pine forestry left, and it will spread further into Africa," said Mike Wingfield, Mondi Professor of Forest Protection at the University of Pretoria.

The killer is a European insect called the Sirex Wood Wasp that lays its eggs in pine trees, said Brett Hurley, an entomologist managing the programme.

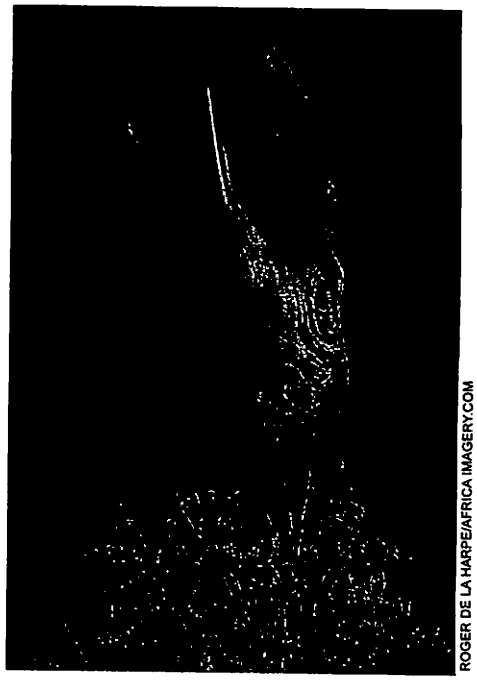
The female inserts a toxic mucus and fungus – on which her larvae feed – into the pine, which kills it. It is not possible to spray for the wood wasp as the damage is done inside the tree.

The European worms get into the wasp larvae, Hurley said, and remain in their bodies until they mature. Then the worms move into the reproductive organs, sterilising the females, who end up laying eggs full of worms.

"This pest is going to be with us forever. It's very unlikely that we will wipe it out," Wingfield said. "What we're trying to do instead is contain it."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO *SUNDAY TIMES*

BLACK RHINO NUMBERS INCREASING



ROGER DE LA HARPE/AFRICA IMAGERY.COM

Africa's endangered Black Rhinoceros population has increased by 500 in the past two years, but it remains critically endangered because of poaching, war and loss of habitat, conservation organisations said.

Studies by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Conservation Union found that there are now around 3 600 Black Rhinoceros in southern Africa, although that is still very low compared with the 65 000 animals recorded in the 1970s. Almost every rhino is individually watched and details about it are recorded. The overall numbers were established by compiling information provided by conservationists and governments meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe.

"The single most important cause for the catastrophic decline of rhinos in the last quarter of the 20th century has been the demand for their horns in the Middle Eastern and Eastern Asian markets," the organisations said.

They say the White Rhinoceros population – which fell to 50 a century ago – now stands at 11 000. But two rhino subspecies are on the verge of extinction. The Northern White Rhinoceros has been reduced to around 20 animals in Congo, while only a handful of Western Black Rhinoceros remain, scattered widely across Cameroon.

"One of the greatest challenges facing the future of rhinos in Africa is maintaining sufficient conservation expenditure and field effort," said Taye Teferi, WWF's African rhino co-ordinator. "Illegal demand for horn, high unemployment, poverty, demand for land, wars, the ready availability of arms, and internal instability also pose a threat to rhino populations." SAPA-A