

regimes should include rest periods to allow the trees to recover.

Source: *Environmental News Service* (2006), <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/dec2006/2006-12-13-01.asp>

Africa's first vulture sanctuary created

An area in the Fouta Djallon Highlands, in the Republic of Guinea, has been set aside as a vulture sanctuary. The Highlands are home to a significant number of West Africa's vultures, six species of which have undergone rapid population declines mainly as a result of human persecution, indirect poisoning and the increasing rarity of carcasses. The sanctuary is not the only measure being taken for the vultures; conservation organizations, including Fauna & Flora International, have been working with Guinée Écologie on a regional West African vulture project that aims to stabilize vulture populations in rural refuges and to help the species recover in the region.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/01/vulture_sanctuary.html

Outcry over killing of storks

Conservationists in Uganda have condemned the killing of Kampala's marabou storks after council workers chopped down the storks' nesting trees on traffic islands, causing chicks to die in the heat of the sun. Although the council workers had been instructed to fell trees near electricity lines, the NGO NatureUganda accused the council of breaching its own environmental guidelines by not waiting until the storks had fledged. The scavenging marabou storks are considered a nuisance by some, but they do perform a valuable role in helping the city to deal with its rubbish problem. Previous attempts to poison the birds were halted following a public outcry, and it is suggested that the only way to control the storks, which are a tourist attraction, would be to clean up the city.

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

One country's dust is another country's fertilizer

New research has found that the majority of dust fertilizing the Brazilian rainforest comes from a single valley in Africa. Satellite data enabled a team of researchers to measure the weight of the dust that is washed from the soil of the

Sahara by rain, and then blown across the Atlantic. The study showed that 50 million t of African dust are deposited in the Amazon every year, and that 56% of this dust comes from the Bodélé Valley north-east of Lake Chad. The shape of the Bodélé Valley may be the reason why so much dust from this particular area ends up in the Amazon; the valley is flanked on both sides by large mountain ridges that create a cone-shaped crater with a narrow opening, which creates a wind tunnel that picks up the dust and blows it towards the Atlantic Ocean.

Source: *Environmental Research Letters* (2006), **1**, (5 pp.) doi /10.1088/1748-9326/1/1/014005

South and South-east Asia

Man's best friend, especially when it comes to tigers

A research project in the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove forest and home to one of the biggest populations of tigers on the planet, has found that pet dogs can help reduce tiger attacks on people. The Sundarbans' tigers kill as many as 50 people per year, with the result that communities in the area are becoming increasingly more hostile towards the tigers. When dogs accompanied groups of fishermen, honey gatherers and woodcutters into the mangrove forest, they were able to detect large animals in the forest and provide enough warning for people to take evasive action. Although the dogs cannot distinguish between different species, their warnings are useful in preventing attacks by tigers, especially for honey gatherers, whose use of smoke makes them particularly vulnerable to attack.

Source: *Cat News* (2006), **45**, 20.

Snow leopard tagged

The shy and elusive snow leopard may soon give up some of its secrets, as a team of researchers have attached a GPS collar to a snow leopard for the first time. Both the habits of the Endangered snow leopard and its rocky, steep habitat in central Asia's mountains, make it hard to study and basic information on its ecology is still lacking. For example, the amount of space needed by a snow leopard is important when planning protected areas for the species, but estimates of the amount of space

required vary from 65 to 1,000 km². The GPS collar will calculate the cat's position several times every day, and this information will then be sent to researchers via satellite. The team behind the tagging hope to catch and tag five snow leopards over the course of the project.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/6188482.stm>

Rats found in Bornean rainforest

The rainforests of Borneo are one of the most species-rich areas of the world, and home to many endemic species. Researchers fear that some species, particularly small endemic mammals, may now be at risk of competition or infectious disease after a trapping study in primary Bornean rainforest caught two black rats *Rattus rattus*. Although the black rat is known to be present on Borneo it was thought that the species was restricted to areas of human habitation, and the two individuals caught during the course of the study are the first to be found in primary rainforest on Borneo.

Source: *Malyan Nature Journal* (2006), **59**, 73–79.

Pygmy hog to be released back into the wild

The world's smallest and rarest pig species, thought to have been extirpated in the 1960s until its rediscovery in Assam in 1971, is to be released back into the wild following a successful captive breeding programme at Durrell Wildlife. From a founding population of six hogs captured in 1995 there is now a population of 70 hogs, which are kept in enclosures that mimic the hogs' natural habitat. A few individuals are being moved from the enclosures in Basistha, in Assam, into a pre-release area before being set free at the start of the next dry season in November. The release of these hogs will boost the wild pygmy hog population in Manas National Park, thought to number only c. 100 individuals.

Source: *Times online* (2007), <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article1288862.ece>

Nepalese rhino numbers dwindle

The number of Endangered Indian rhinos in Nepal has fallen sharply since 2005 as a result of poaching in Chitwan National Park. The animals are targeted for their horn, which is believed to have aphrodisiac qualities. Before the creation of the National Park in 1976 the

population of this subspecies had fallen to less than 100 individuals but following the Park's designation numbers began to increase again, and a census in 2000 revealed that there were 544 individual rhinos in the Park. By 2005, however, this number had fallen to 372, as poaching levels increased. Conservationists are working with villagers in the area to try and enforce anti-poaching measures.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6111614.stm

Borneo's fires kill orang-utans

Forest fires on Borneo may have killed up to 1,000 orang-utans, according to the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation. While some orang-utans have been rescued after finding their way to the fires' edge, many are thought to have perished, and others have been killed by locals after eating from the area's oil palm plantations. Forest fires are an annual event in Indonesia, and are largely blamed on farmers and logging companies clearing land to grow oil palm plantations. Habitat loss is one of the main reasons for the decline of the Endangered orang-utan, and the lack of natural habitat means that orang-utans have few places to go to escape the forest fires.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/6123696.stm>

Largest flock of white-shouldered ibis recorded

Counts of the white-shouldered ibis at two sites in Cambodia recorded the highest number of individuals of this Critically Endangered species to date. The two sites, both in western Siem Pang District, yielded an overall count of 108 individuals. It is clear from this survey that western Siem Pang District is the single most important site in the world for the ibis, whose global population is thought to number only c. 250 mature individuals. The NGO BirdLife is working with government departments to secure western Siem Pang as a protected forest, and work is also ongoing with local communities to improve monitoring of wildlife populations and to encourage the management of the forest wetlands used as roosts by the white-shouldered ibis.

Source: *BirdLife News* (2006), http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/12/white-shouldered_ibis.html

Kashmir insurgency good for wildlife

The separatist militancy that has been ongoing in Kashmir since the late 1980s has had a marked benefit for Kashmir's wildlife, with an average increase in the population of the area's native animals and birds of 20–60%. The Chief Wildlife Warden of the area puts the increases down to the request to locals to deposit their weapons with police stations at the beginning of the insurgency, which resulted in hunters being deprived of their weapons, and people not daring to go into the forests for fear of being caught in exchanges between militants and the security forces.

Source: *BBC News* (2006), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6169969.stm

Plan for seismic survey suffers setback

The Chief Wildlife Warden of Assam has written to India's Ministry of Environment and Forests to try and halt the proposed seismic survey of the Brahmaputra river bed. Oil India Ltd is planning to use boats, hovercrafts, all-terrain vehicles and explosives in the survey, which aims to locate new reserves of hydrocarbons within Assam. However, a number of organizations have raised fears about the effects of the seismic survey on the biodiversity of the area. Of particular concern is the Endangered gangetic river dolphin, as studies have shown that seismic surveys can have a detrimental effect on marine cetaceans.

Source: *The Indian Express* (2006), <http://www.indianexpress.com/story/18192.html>

Conservationists celebrate vulture chick

The first oriental white-backed vulture chick to be hatched in captivity in India has provided a boost for vultures in the Asian sub-continent, where the decline of three vulture species as a result of poisoning by diclofenac has been well documented. The vulture breeding centre, in northern India, is run by the Bombay Natural History Society and supported by government departments, as well as other organizations, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Zoological Society of London. Despite the hatching of the chick, conservationists warn that there is still a long way to go before populations recover fully, and that even the

phasing out of diclofenac may take up to 10 years.

Source: *BBC News* (2007), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/6241745.stm>

East Asia

Molecular monitoring reveals incomplete reporting of cetacean bycatch

A comparison of meat found in whale meat markets in the Republic of (South) Korea with official records has shown a number of discrepancies. Korea has no programme of commercial or scientific whaling, and so researchers assumed that all meat in these markets originated from cetacean bycatch. The meat was identified to species level using mitochondrial DNA or cytochrome *b* sequences, and it was found that products from eight species were recorded in 2003, and 11 species in 2004. However, official records only reported five cetacean species as having been caught as bycatch in 2003, and only six in 2004. In addition, there were further inconsistencies in the expected frequency of products from most species.

Source: *Animal Conservation* (2006), **9**, 474–482.

Chiru seem to be making a comeback

An expedition to the remote Chang Tang and Kekexili reserves in Tibet and Qinghai, China, has found signs that the population of the Tibetan antelope, or chiru, is slowly increasing following the cessation of heavy poaching that occurred in the 1990s. The antelope, prized for the fine wool that makes shahtoosh shawls, had suffered a decline in numbers to c. 75,000 individuals from an estimated one million in Chang Tang in the 1950s, but now the population is 100,000–110,000. The rise in numbers has resulted from China making chiru hunting illegal, and confiscating many guns. Likewise, strict anti-poaching measures have been implemented, and two additional nature reserves adjacent to the Chang Tang reserve have also been protected.

Source: *National Geographic News* (2007), <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/02/070206-tibet-antelope.html>