

Specialist Group Updates



The establishment of Orchid Conservation International should overcome many of the obstacles faced in fundraising for the Specialist Group. The Group will remain as an active network but benefit from the organizational support of Orchid Conservation International and improved alliances with other conservation organizations, orchid networks, and societies. For further information, contact Shelagh Kell at shelagh.kell@dial.pipex.com.

Shelagh Kell, Executive Officer

An Opportunity for Specialist Groups—BirdLife International

The BP (formerly British Petroleum) Conservation Programme, a partnership between BirdLife International, BP, and Fauna and Flora International, helps international teams of students carry out conservation projects that address global conservation priorities at a local level and deliver major new scientific findings with a long term impact on conservation. Since 1985, the Programme has supported 194 projects in 60 countries.

“Our work has progressed enormously thanks to our BP Conservation Award”, says Milagros Lopez Mendilaharsu, leader of the Karumbé sea turtle project. “Thanks to our Gold Award in 2001, we have completed our entire field research program for the year as planned, set up two turtle research camps, and trained volunteers from

Argentina and Uruguay.” The team’s work with getting baseline data on Uruguay’s sea turtles and co-operating with local fishing communities has been making a real difference, and the project continues to grow.

In South Africa, another BP Gold Award went to a team from Rhodes University, whose project has been set up to restore species-rich Cape heathland, or “Fynbos”. This vegetation type is endangered throughout its range as a result of development, grazing, agriculture and the invasion of alien plant species. Focusing on the Grassy Fynbos in the Eastern Cape, the project aims to understand the complex ecosystem degradation process, and to identify keystone species and methods that will help with restoration. The end result will be a management plan and public awareness campaign to involve local communities in the restoration of this unique ecosystem.

In July 2002, a team of young Colombian ornithologists, also winners of a BP Gold Award, rediscovered the indigo-winged parrot, considered one of the world’s rarest birds. This is the first concrete evidence of the continued existence of the species for 91 years. Jorge Velasquez and Alonso Quevedo discovered 14 parrots as they explored the highest Andean volcano in central Colombia. Jorge recalled how after months of unsuccessful searches in the Andean montane forests, he and Alonso heard the parrots for the first time: “...suddenly, a parrot’s sharp cry pierced the gloom of the cloudy forest, and was immediately joined by a chorus of other birds in the mist. We thought we were witnessing a miracle from heaven, as one of the world’s rarest birds descended before our very eyes.”

These three projects exemplify the aims of the BP Conservation Programme and its annual awards. In 2003, the Programme is expanding significantly. Two additional partners, Conservation International and the Wildlife Conservation Society, both leading international conservation organizations are joining the Programme. This expanded partnership should bring strengthened support network to applicants and winners, and means more capacity for training and development. With this growth, the size of awards has significantly increased and the Programme will be supporting at least 26 young teams with a total of USD 600,000. A representative from each award winning team is also given the chance to attend training workshops on fieldwork techniques and project planning.

For more information concerning the BP Conservation Programme, please visit the website <http://conservation.bp.com> or contact Marianne Dunn, Programme Manager at: bp-conservation-programme@birdlife.org.uk.

Marianne Dunn, Programme Manager

African Elephant

Human Elephant Conflict Working Group

The newly re-appointed Human Elephant Conflict Working Group held its first meeting on 30-31 May in Nairobi. This meeting was fully funded by the European Commission. The main topic for discussion was the new WWF-funded project aimed at reducing levels of human–elephant conflict at selected sites in Africa. The goal of this project is to build the capacity of wildlife managers and local communities to mitigate conflict through supervised use and testing of the Group’s technical products for conflict mitigation over the next three years.

Elephant Translocation

Despite the increasing number of African elephant translocations, very little technical guidance exists to inform translocation practitioners about the issues that need to be considered. In an effort to fill this technical vacuum, the Group, together with the Re-introduction Specialist Group, recently set up a task force to begin drafting guidelines of ‘best practice’ for translocation. The document, which will give guidelines on all main technical issues that need to be taken into account both at the source and recipient sites, is expected to be ready for distribution by mid-2003. It is hoped that by raising awareness of the problem areas and best practices, and by discouraging inappropriate and ill-informed translocations, this new ‘tool’ will become a useful reference document for African elephant translocation practitioners and their donors.

African Elephant Status Report

With the planned modifications to the structure and functionality of the African Elephant Database now implemented, preparations for the production of the African Elephant Status Report 2002 are in full swing. Data from survey reports and other sources of information are being digitized and entered in the database, in preparation for analysis. The report is expected to come out in the middle of 2003.

Transborder Elephant Corridors

The protection of elephant habitat, especially migration corridors in transborder areas and the need to establish and manage such corridors are recognized as priority activities in the Strategy for the Conservation of West African Elephants. A number of the most important West African elephant populations straddle international borders. This creates special conservation challenges for the wildlife management authorities. To respond to these challenges the African Elephant Specialist Group’s West Africa Programme Office held a workshop to develop a strategic plan for the protection and management of cross-border elephant corridors. The main objectives of the meeting, attended by national wildlife authori-

ties and technical experts, were to identify the main cross-border corridors and to discuss ways that their long-term protection can be assured through close cooperation between the range states. The workshop was funded by Conservation International’s Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund.

Central Africa Elephant Strategy

In September members of the Group’s Secretariat met with wildlife directors of several central African elephant range States. The wildlife authorities gave their full endorsement to the idea of drafting a sub-regional elephant conservation strategy for central Africa. The Group was mandated to take this process forward by preparing technical background documentation on the status of the elephants in the sub-region and by drafting a proposal for organizing a multi-stakeholder workshop to develop the strategy. With a fully functional program office in Yaoundé Cameroon, the Group is well poised to meet this challenge.

Leo Niskanen, Programme Officer

A new tool will raise awareness of problem areas and best practices for African Elephant translocations

African Rhino

African Rhino Specialist Group Meeting

The sixth African Rhino Specialist Group Meeting, in June 2002, updated the numbers and trends of both wild and captive African rhinos. While numbers of two subspecies remain very low, I am pleased to report that numbers of black and white rhino continue to increase reaching 3,100 and 11,670 respectively by the end of 2001. This is encouraging, though there is still much to be concerned about and certainly there is no room for complacency. Further details of the latest rhino numbers will be found in the next edition (33) of *Pachyderm*. In addition to compiling the continental statistics, African Rhino Specialist Group meetings also facilitate information exchange and collaboration between range State members, other members and invited delegates. The members-only meeting evaluated the contributions of the group over the past two years and identified future priorities.

Cameroon

Since I last reported on Cameroon (*Species 37*), a novel approach for Black rhino conservation (which will not divert any traditional funding away from other rhino conservation projects) has been developed by Campbell Scott (see *Pachyderm* 33 for more details). Campbell proposes to undertake another survey to try to

confirm again whether a nucleus for a viable population remains, and to dart and radio-collar any rhino seen. Should this project succeed in demonstrating that a viable founder group still remains, then funding can be sought to try to put the rest of the recovery plan into action.

Other News

The findings of the SADC Rhino Management Group’s Black rhino biological management workshop continue to be circulated widely and the proceedings will shortly be available electronically at www.rhino-sadc.org. The Specialist Group, a consortium partner, provides technical direction and input to the SADC regional rhino program.

Recently the Specialist Group’s Chair, Scientific Officer and three specialist members visited proposed black rhino sanctuary sites to discuss and examine the proposed black rhino reintroduction project with both Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) and North Luangwa Conservation Project (NLCP) staff (being funded by Frankfurt Zoological Society). The team concluded that the carrying capacity of the proposed sanctuaries in North Luangwa National Park was suitable for the proposed introductions and the team was impressed with the work being done by the wildlife authority and project staff. It is hoped that the first phase of the introduction project will take place next year.

Rhino Fund Uganda’s plan to establish a population of white rhinos in a sanctuary in Uganda looks set to happen soon. Also the number of founder rhino has been increased in Tanzania’s Mkhomazi Game Reserve, and finally the introduction of significant numbers of additional founder white rhino to Chief’s Island, Botswana, is to continue.

Thanks to the WWF African Rhino Programme, WWF-US and WWF-SA who together support the Group’s secretariat and the 2002 meeting.

Martin Brooks, Chair

Afrotheria

The Afrotheria Specialist Group was formed in 2001. Our 30 members include a Section Coordinator for each of the mammalian groups that we cover: hyraxes, aardvark, sengis (elephant-shrews), tenrecs, and golden moles. We assembled this diverse mix of mammals by: splitting off sengis, tenrecs and golden moles from the old Insectivore, Tree-Shrew, and Elephant-Shrew Specialist Group (the new Insectivore Specialist Group now includes moles, shrews, and hedgehogs); absorbing the Hyrax Specialist Group; and adopting the Aardvark.

We chose this odd assortment of mammals for several reasons. Our species are all essentially African and Malagasy, which gives us a strong geographical focus for our educational and conservation activities. In addition, there is ever-growing evidence that these highly distinctive groups actually share an ancient but common African ancestry, along with the sea cows and elephants (see our web site located at www.calacademy.org/research/bmammals/afrotheria/ASG.html for details). The charismatic sea cows and elephants already have very active specialist groups, and these larger species also occur far beyond Africa. “Our” species, however, are mostly small and secretive mammals. This lack of glamour means that they are often overlooked by the public as well as conservation agencies and organizations.

Although one might think that we would be working with a large number of mammals, in fact there are only about 73 species. On the one hand, this allows us to focus on a workable number of animals that often share similar conservation problems and solutions. On the other hand, the current IUCN Red List indicates that almost 45% of our species are threatened, with a status of Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered. We are currently re-assessing all our species for the IUCN Red List, and soon will begin preparing an update and expansion of *African Insectivora and Elephant-Shrews—An Action Plan for their Conservation* that was published in 1990. We then hope to fundraise for some priority projects to help conserve threatened Afrotheria.

To learn more about the Afrotheria Specialist Group visit our new web site, where you can view the first edition of our newsletter, *Afrotherian Conservation*.

Galen B. Rathbun, Chair



Asian Elephant

The Asian Elephant Specialist Group held a full meeting of the group in Cambodia, May 2002. This meeting convened to discuss the draft Asian Elephant Action Plan. Generous funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Asian Elephant Conservation Fund), Chester Zoo (UK), and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (UK) made it possible for more than 100 participants from 18 countries to attend. The support of the Cambodian government was also crucial to the success of the meeting. The support of Fauna and Flora International for a Cambodian regional office of the Group also made holding the meeting at Phnom Penh possible.

The Cambodian Secretary of State, H.E. Chan Tong Yves, opened the meeting. Presentations on the status of the elephant in the range States and the highlights of the country chapters of the draft action plan followed. One of the highlights was the importance given to regionalization of activities and communication among the membership. Accordingly, four working groups were constituted for discussing regional issues of elephant conservation. These were Mainland Southeast Asia, Indonesia/Sabah Malaysia, Southern India/Sri Lanka and Northern and Central India, Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Regional issues were discussed and several recommendations were made to update the draft country chapters. A final review of the chapters is underway.

Four task forces were established to provide the framework for the further work of the group and management guidelines on various issues. The deliberations of the task forces were not to be confined to those present at the meeting, but extend to the entire membership as well as other experts. The different task forces and the issues discussed were:

- *Human-Elephant Conflict, which considered payment of compensation for damage to crop and loss of human life, alternative land-use and cropping patterns, mobile anti-depredation units, translocating chronic crop-raiding or rogue elephants, and research on innovative, reliable, and low-cost conflict mitigation measures.*
- *Poaching and Ivory Trade, which discussed protocols for registration of ivory stocks, implications for Asian elephants if trade in African ivory is resumed, capacity building in range States for monitoring poaching and the ivory trade, and scientific determination of African and Asian ivory.*
- *Captive Elephant Management, which discussed the broad principles for the care and welfare of captive elephants, establishing a database of captive elephants, and the need for a Coordinating Office to serve as a resource center for information about captive elephants, to facilitate communication and to administer the work of the Task Force.*

- *Habitat mapping and GIS Task Force, which discussed guidelines and standards for elephant habitat mapping and population estimation, building technical capacity to gather scientific data, and develop techniques for effective monitoring of Asian elephant populations.*

The membership expressed enthusiasm for the idea of setting up regional chapters of the Group, and to work in sub-groups across the range countries to improve communication and streamline conservation efforts.

Joshua David, Assistant to the Chair

Bison – Europe

The European portion of the Bison Specialist Group recently met in Bialowieza (Poland) to begin developing a species Action Plan. The meeting was organized by previous Bison Specialist Group chair, Zdzisaw Pucek. During all three meeting days, Action Plan topics were discussed and, after much hard editorial work, a first draft of the Action Plan for European bison (*Bison bonasus L.*) was completed. This draft has been provided to all Bison Specialist Group members for their comment. Our thanks go to the Large Herbivore Initiative of WWF—The World Wide Fund for Nature for supporting this initiative.

The future of the European bison lies in both captive and free breeding. Free herds are distributed in eastern European countries, but numbers of individuals must be doubled. In some areas, viable meta-populations need to be created with the involvement of locally existing herds. The creation of a meta-population in the trans-boundary region of East Carpathians (Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia and Romania) is underway, coordinated by Dr. Kajetan Perzanowski. He has already made plans for the re-introductions of animals including a re-introduction planned for next spring in Slovakia, near the border with Poland. Last year, four animals were added to the herd in Poland because the genetic analysis showed a need for greater diversity in the gene pool of this particular herd. Scandinavian zoos participating in the European Endangered Species Program for European bison provided the animals. After a few months of quarantine, the animals were radio-collared and released to join the wild herd.

The website for the Bison Specialist Group in Europe is currently under construction.

Wanda Olech, Co-Chair for Europe

The future of the European bison lies in both captive and free breeding