

populations of several globally threatened species, including the Critically Endangered sociable lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, the Endangered white-headed duck *Oxyura leucocephala* and the Vulnerable greater spotted eagle *Aquila clanga*. The expedition counted more than 400,000 waterbirds at natural and human-made wetlands, and in total 185 bird species were recorded. Another aim of the expedition was to pass on techniques and tools, including optical equipment, field guides and the use of GPS, to the Syrian conservationists who accompanied the team. Syria's fast-growing population and rapid changes in lifestyle and economic practices have already damaged some Important Bird Areas and there is an urgent need for systematic fieldwork to provide data for effective conservation.

Source: *World Birdwatch* (2004), 26(4), 6.

Two new national parks created in Turkey

The government of Turkey has recently created two new national parks. In October 2004 the Sarikamış Allahuekber Mountain National Park was established, covering 23,500 ha of predominantly coniferous forest ecosystems in Turkey's Caucasus region. A month later, the Mount Agri National Park was established in eastern Turkey near the Russian and Iranian borders; this park covers 87,830 ha and includes Turkey's highest peak, Mt Agri (5,137 m), also known as Mt Ararat, believed by many to be the biblical landing site of Noah's Ark. Together the two parks increase Turkey's protected areas to 797,000 ha.

Source: http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=16834

Sub-Saharan Africa

Parasitic disease threatens reintroduced animals

A specialist in veterinary tropical diseases is warning that a parasitic disease, babesiosis, could kill just about any animal reintroduced into Africa. The *Babesia* parasite is transmitted by ticks and invades and destroys the host's blood cells, causing symptoms such as fever, anaemia and a swollen spleen. In the wild, rhinos, lions and other animals build up immunity to babesiosis. Reintroduced animals are susceptible in two ways. Firstly, the stress of reintroduction

may block the normal ability of their immune system to control the disease. Secondly, some animals bred in captivity have had no opportunity to build up natural immunity. Captive animals should be given imidocarb, a drug designed to prevent babesiosis in domestic cattle, before they are released.

Source: *New Scientist* (2004), 184(2474), 7.

African rhinos on the increase

Latest estimates put Africa's total rhino population at 14,720 of which 3,630 are black rhinos, which have seen an increase of 500 (15%) in the past 2 years. There are currently 11,090 white rhinos, although as few as 20 are northern white rhino, a race now reduced to a tiny population in Garamba National Park on the border of Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. The increase in numbers of black rhino is encouraging after a decline from c. 65,000 in the 1970s to only 2,400 in the mid 1990s. However, there are still reckoned to be 90% fewer black rhinos than there were 30 years ago.

Source: *Swara* (2004), 27(3), 10–11.

Study shows that mahoganies need specialized soils

A new study has shown that three of the four mahogany species in the Central African Republic are restricted to soils with particular chemical characteristics. Previous analyses of links between tree distribution and soil conditions have focused on features such as topography, missing out the importance of soil chemistry. There are practical implications of this study. It is notoriously difficult to improve mahogany regeneration and this work suggests that it is more feasible to plan long-term management of the trees *in situ* rather than continue with the traditional 'mining' of mahogany.

Source: *Ecology* (2004), 85, 8.

Fertilizer could be key to controlling water hyacinth

A Kenyan scientist has produced a fertilizer from water hyacinth that contains high concentrations of critical plant nutrients. Water hyacinth has caused countless problems in waterways around the world, and if the process of production is proved to be practical this could well be a huge financial success. An American firm, BML International, is planning to put 3 billion shillings (US \$38 million) into the project. The fertilizer is prepared from the juices of water hyacinth and is available as a liquid. Ninety-five percent of the juices extracted from the plant can be used

directly while the rest can be processed into pellets that would serve as animal feed. The fertilizer is also 75% cheaper than other market equivalents.

Source: *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (2004), 49(7–8), 528.

A new approach to cheetah identification

The cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* is considered to be one of the most threatened cats in Africa. The total number in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated at 9,000–12,000. Population estimates rely on precise identification of individuals and a new photographic identification technique may help in this respect. The Masai-Mara Cheetah Conservation Project in Kenya has used photographic identification as a survey tool. The tail rings, and spot patterns on the face, chest, body and limbs are unique in the cheetah and therefore are used in identification. In the field, markings on the tail and limbs are of most practical use. Comparisons between animals can be made using the photographs or by using a 3-D computer matching system. There are various problems with this new method but it is economically and technically affordable and has been used successfully for the identification of individuals in Kenya.

Source: *Cat News* (2004), 41, 27–29.

Plans for an 'eco-wall' in the Virunga National Park

The Virunga National Park covers an area of 800,000 ha straddling the borders of Rwanda, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo and is home to the threatened mountain gorilla *Gorilla beringei beringei*. Following reports of massive deforestation in the park's Mikenko sector as a result of encroachment by farmers and pastoralists, a coalition of conservation organizations and local communities are to build a dry stone wall in an attempt to prevent further damage. The 'eco-wall' will stretch for 20 km and patrols and inspections along its length will help monitor the situation. The project to build the wall includes a 2,000-plus workforce consisting of six Rwandan community associations and a further 12 Congolese associations.

Source: http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/other_news/news.cfm?uNewsID=17357

Bonobos under severe threat in Congo Basin

The first detailed survey of a known stronghold for bonobos or pygmy chimpanzees has found little evidence of