

vere habitat degradation has made the spiny forest the most endangered forest type in Madagascar – after burning and clearing for agriculture, invasive plant species take over and today thick stands of opuntia (prickly pear) and sisal (agave) dominate the landscape; current political instability has resulted in increased open access to natural resources and illegal pet trade. The radiated tortoise is still able to 'make a living' and survive in this degraded habitat. However, the tortoise cannot survive the current threat of wholesale collection for food markets. Community mobilization linked to sustainable habitat protection is needed to save this unique critically endangered species.

The Wildlife Conservation Society's Bronx Zoo owns many radiated tortoises, with about a dozen held at the zoo and others at the Behler Chelonian Conservation Center (Ojai, California) and other U.S. zoos. Many of these are SSP-recommended animals for breeding. These animals form a significant percentage of the animals in the U.S.

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Ol Pejeta rhino project update

The project to transfer four (2.2) northern white rhinos from Dvur Králové Zoo, Czech Republic, to the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya [see *IZN* 56 (7), 432–434] was logistically challenging. The animals were trucked in specially-designed crates from the zoo to Prague, then flown to Nairobi and driven to the conservancy, a trip of nearly 24 hours going from European winter to African heat. Though all the rhinos were in good condition, there was some uncertainty over how they would handle the move.

Fortunately, the operation went smoothly. After initially being kept in small enclosures, or bomas, the rhinos are now spending most of their time

grazing in larger paddocks. This is the first critical step to their introduction into two 600-acre [24-ha] breeding areas. It is still early days, but all signs at the moment are good.

Ol Pejeta is an ideal safe haven as it has excellent anti-poaching teams, good habitat and a growing southern white rhino population. These four rhinos carry valuable genetic diversity, such as resistance to disease, and it is hoped that once back in natural conditions, they will breed again and re-establish a wild population.

'It is gratifying to see how well the rhinos have adapted to their new surroundings and a wild diet,' says Dr Rob Brett, FFI Africa Regional Director and member of the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group. 'The stimulus of living with other white rhinos over the next few months will give them the best chances of getting into the right condition to breed naturally.'

Abridged from *FFI Update* (the newsletter of Fauna & Flora International) No. 15 (Spring 2010)

First wild-born cheetahs for 40 years in Arabia

The last known Arabian cheetah was shot in Saudi Arabia in 1950, though they may have hung on in Oman until around 1970. Now four cubs have been born in the wild in the Arabian Wildlife Park, a nature reserve on Sir Bani Yas Island off the coast of the United Arab Emirates. This is believed to be the first time that cheetahs have been successfully reintroduced into the wild anywhere in the world.

The mother and father of the cubs, Safira and Gabriel, were raised in Dubai's Wildlife Centre and the Sharjah Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife [see *IZN* 56 (4), 218–222]. The cheetahs were brought to the island as part of conservation efforts which include breeding, re-wilding, and releasing into the

park to become an integral part of the natural population control for hoofed species on the island.

The Sir Bani Yas Island conservation team spends a great deal of time and effort putting captive-bred animals who are brought to the island through a 're-wilding' programme and ensuring that the animals are trained to hunt and be self-sufficient before they are released into the park. Once they are released, the team is removed completely from the animals' day-to-day activities. Safira and Gabriel are a telling example of what can be achieved through re-wilding, as they hunt and fend for themselves without human interference.

Survival rates for cheetah cubs are very low both in the wild and in captivity, but Safira is doing an impressive job of taking care of her cubs, even though she was raised by humans. She has not yet moved the cubs from their original birthplace in a small cave in the mountains. She is fitted with a radio collar and can be tracked and monitored by the conservation team on the island.

The flagship species on Sir Bani Yas is the Arabian oryx, which was introduced in 1971. Now, there are around 400 oryx on the island, roaming freely in the park.

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Frogs threatened by New Zealand Government proposal

In the 1990s areas of New Zealand that were considered to be of 'high conservation value' (including many national parks) were placed on Schedule 4, which recognised their conservation significance and proclaimed them as 'no go areas' for all other activities. The Government is now asking for public submissions about their proposal to remove some of this land from Schedule 4 to open it up for mining (coal, gold, iron ore and rare minerals). The areas to be mined include

several sites where the frog populations have been continually monitored for over 40 years – this represents the best data on frog populations anywhere in the world. In addition, one proposed mining area includes the 'type' localities of Archey's frog (*Leiopelma archeyi*) and Hochstetter's frog (*L. hochstetteri*). These endangered species (Archey's are Critically Endangered, having lost 88% of their population since 1996) are just hanging in there and without help they will disappear. 'Save our frogs – stop the mining' is currently the biggest issue in New Zealand conservation. More information on how the frogs will be affected (including maps of distribution and proposed areas to be mined) is available at www.nzfrogs.org.

Abridged from an Amphibian Ark press release (www.amphibianark.org)

Climate change might threaten African leaf-eating primates

Primate species will become 'increasingly at risk of extinction' because of global warming, according to new research. It reveals that populations of monkeys and apes in Africa that depend largely on a diet of leaves could be wiped out by a rise in annual temperatures of two degrees Celsius. The study by researchers from Bournemouth University, Roehampton University and the University of Oxford suggests that the species most at risk are the already endangered gorillas and colobine monkeys.

The study, published online in December by *Animal Behaviour*, pinpoints which species are most threatened by climate change in a series of new global maps. They show current and predicted distribution patterns of primates, comparing the populations according to their diet and the amount of enforced rest they are predicted to need.

They warn that Old World monkey populations in Africa will be hardest hit even by a very modest two degrees Cel-