



More Threatened Species

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) announced that its “Red List” of threatened species worldwide now exceeds 16,000 entries.



According to the IUCN, one in three amphibians, a quarter of the world’s coniferous trees, an eighth of birds and a quarter of mammals are in jeopardy.

Achim Steiner, Director General of the IUCN, said, “The 2006 Red List shows a clear trend: biodiversity loss is increasing, not slowing

down. The implications for this trend for the productivity and resilience of ecosystems and the lives and livelihoods of billions of people who depend on them are far-reaching.”

Around 1.75 million species are known today and the actual number in the world is thought to be around 15 million.

The countries with the largest number of threatened species are Australia, Brazil, China and Mexico.

The new Red List increases the number of threatened species from 15,589 in 2004 to 16,119.

According to the IUCN, polar bears will suffer more than a 30 per cent population decline in the next 45 years due to climate change, and are listed as Vulnerable. The same rating is given to the goitered

gazelle, while the dama gazelle is upgraded to Critically Endangered. The common hippopotamus is classified as Vulnerable largely as a result of the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

White-tailed eagles are downlisted to Least Concern and the seabird Abbott’s booby moves from Critically Endangered to Endangered.

Fish are now being systematically assessed by IUCN, with 20 per cent of the 547 species listed as threatened with extinction. The angel shark and common skate are both upgraded to Critically Endangered. More than half of the 252 endemic freshwater Mediterranean fish are also threatened with extinction.

Eugene Lapointe, President of IWMC, said: “It is clear that conservation is an ongoing and critical issue for everybody on the planet. We have to continue working hard to establish workable solutions to conservation problems.” ■

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Editorial : Conservation and the International Whaling Commission By Eugene Lapointe



Conservation means using a resource in a way that ensures its perpetuity. In other words, that use must be demonstrably sustainable, backed by on-going scientific research that examines resource characteristics through time under changing environmental conditions.

In addition to assessing the numerical strength of the resource, knowledge can be enhanced by assessing the relationships of different resources in the same environment. In the case of cetaceans, the migratory behavior, feeding ecology and impact on each local ecosystem are all important elements to ensuring proper conservation.

The International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling (ICRW) is the treaty through which many countries have chosen to conduct the business of whaling. Ostensibly, the ICRW is well suited to conservation because it mandates that scientific research be carried out on cetaceans that are to be utilized.

Conservation in that traditional sense is the goal of all those who practice, or who plan to practice, sustainable commercial hunts of whales. Conservation does not mean cessation of all use of a resource, nor does it mean “non-consumptive” use, as is the case with whale watching.

Whale watching may be an attractive leisure activity to some people, but it does not contribute to whale conservation. Anecdotal accounts of whale numbers in relatively small areas lack the necessary statistical rigor for the compilation of reliable stock estimates. Casual observations of whales take no account of the animals’ health, nutritional status, sex and age profiles, pollution loads, diet, and fertility status. Whale watching does not assist conservation and some argue that it should be limited because it disturbs whales unnecessarily, pollutes the environment and can lead to injuries from collisions.

Members of the IWC are sharply divided into two polarized camps.

One side deplores any harvest of cetaceans if that activity is defined as “commercial” – meaning that the products of the hunt are sold in domestic or international markets for human consumption. The other side insists that commercial whaling can and must be conducted in a transparent manner, consistent with rigorous oversight to ensure sustainability through adherence to previously agreed upon quotas. They point to DNA databases as tools that can demonstrate adherence to IWC rules and expectations of compliance.

Some nations have belittled the rigorous scientific research of nations that wish to resume commercial whaling. This has not aided the practice of conservation or public perceptions of the proper role of science in whale research. Publicly stated distrust of nations by one another has not contributed to a global environment of cooperation in conservation of common cetacean resources. This situation of political conflict in the IWC has been the unfortunate result of accommodating a large number of politically influential, anti-whaling NGOs. Their global network has encouraged nations to stand apart from one another, rather than working together to find compromises on quotas, oversight schemes, research methods and goals.

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The June 2006 IWC meeting in St. Kitts will not see final resolution of this unfortunate global conflict, nor general agreement on cetacean conservation programs. However, depending on numbers of nations recruited and influenced by each side, there may be a shift in voting.

We hope that this will be the year in which the IWC plenary votes for measures that support the true conservation of whales.

I urge all participants in St. Kitts to act in good faith to promote conservation, cooperate in a genuine spirit of good will, and

accept with grace the results of an effort to improve what has been a difficult social, political and diplomatic situation. Perhaps 2006 will be the year in which nations finally begin to work together to carry out the goals and the spirit of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. ■

Polar Bears in Extinction Scare

Dire predictions have been made about the future of the polar bear. While the IUCN was making its gloomy forecast, Australian scientist Tim Flannery went further, telling Canadian journalists that the arctic species will actually be extinct within twenty-five years, due to diminished ice packs on which to hunt, rest and den.

Around 15,000 of the world's 22,000 polar bears are located in Canada.



However, Canadian polar bear expert, Ian Stirling, told the Edmonton Journal that the species is not under any imminent risk of extinction, although the number of polar bears in the Hudson Bay area has reduced by about 20 per cent over the last three decades. According to Stirling, the only thing that could lead to extinction is the disappearance of the ice altogether.

Andrew Weaver, an atmospheric scientist at the University of Victoria, said, "There will always be ice in the winter, and when I say always, always is as long as it's worth predicting – like thousands and thousands of years."

H. Sterling Burnett of the National Center for Policy Analysis in Washington, DC criticized "environmental alarmists". Quoting Arctic temperature statistics, he wrote in the Washington Times that "based on the available evidence there is little reason to believe the current warming trend will lead to extinction of polar bears."

Meanwhile, Conservation International, in a separate report funded in part by the World Wildlife Fund, claimed that global warming will lead to "massive waves of species extinctions" which, in some areas, is "rivaling and even surpassing deforestation as the main threat to biodiversity." ■

Cayman Green Turtle Conservation Moves Forward

The UK government has approved a shipment of live green turtles to a number of European aquariums by the Cayman Islands Turtle Farm under a program designed to improve public education on marine life matters and boost conservation efforts.

The lush tropical habitat found in the western Cayman Islands provides a perfect breeding ground for the endangered green sea turtle. Since

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In 1980 the Cayman Islands Turtle Farm has released more than 30,000 captive-bred green turtles. The farm also hopes to supply turtle meat and shell for export.

The move was criticized by the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, a Florida-based NGO which argues that the green turtle became endangered due to over-harvesting for the international specialty meat market, centered especially in Europe. The NGO claims there is no scientific research on the impact of releasing farmed turtles into the wild. They say that the farmed hybrids of various strains of green turtle may have a negative affect on existing depleted wild populations.

In response, the farmers point out that hybrid vigor has always been recognized as a way to maintain and increase genetic diversity in populations, therefore increasing the chances of species adapting to changing environmental conditions. The CCC also argues that the com-

mercialization of turtle products may endanger remaining wild stocks because it could increase international demand and prompt uncontrolled black market harvesting. Not so, say the farmers, who say that the commercial incentives are supporting conservation and point to the case of American alligators as an example of how farming helps species to recover.

In the 1980s the American alligator became seriously depleted due to over-harvesting of wild specimens for their hide, which was made into popular leather products. Alligator farming created a dramatic increase in the population and this was enhanced by releasing farmed specimens into the wild in an effort to re-establish wild breeding populations. Today, the American alligator is no longer endangered, the commercial market for meat and skins is flourishing, and the animal has become so numerous that it has even become a menace and a pest in some areas. ■

Conservationist demands Clean Up of CITES

Prominent South African conservationist and pro-hunting activist, Ron Thompson, has presented critical comments to the South African Minister of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), Marthinus van Schalkwyk, on what he characterizes as weaknesses and problems with the way CITES works.

In a letter dated May 14, 2006, Thompson argues that South Africa can no longer afford to trust its future in conservation to the political whims of countries that have no practical stake in issues such as African elephant or other big game management.

According to Thompson, there is no scientific justification for CITES listing entire animal species on its list of “highly endangered” creatures, because the prevalence of fenced game preserves in South Africa has resulted in already well-managed local populations of game. Kruger National Park has too many elephants for its rapidly deteriorating habitat. Thompson requests the DEAT to consider moves requesting CITES to clean up “corrupt” practices and get back to appropriate trade regulation, rather than continue to pursue harmful trade abolitions.

Thompson believes that anti-hunting NGOs have successfully subverted the original purpose of CITES – to regulate international trade in species products in order to effect conservation – replacing them with measures that totally impede trade in products such as ivory. Legal and regulated ivory sales could be the basis of funding support for continuing conservation and oversight of southern Africa’s multi-species habitats.

And Thompson cites as “common-place” the practice of anti-use NGOs routinely bribing poor nations’ delegates to CITES so that

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measures that impede trade in wildlife products are passed.

He called on the Minister to take back the management of South Africa's wild resources, by adopting a strong stand in national legislative matters that would accomplish this goal. Unless the CITES political process is corrected by removal of the accreditation of animal rights/environmentalist NGOs in its midst, Thompson believes that its original mission will never be realized. He says that South Africa can no longer afford to be a part of such an organization. The ultimate decision – to leave CITES – could spark a similar move by other Parties that presently find their conservation programs thwarted by animal rights NGO influences on CITES.

Similar calls have been made for limiting the influence of NGOs at the International Whaling Commission (IWC). The IWC is supposed to facilitate “the conservation of whales and the orderly development of the whaling industry” but has been thwarted by measures such as the moratorium on commercial whaling, which exists despite scientific data that shows many whale species are abundant and can sustain managed commercial hunts. ■

News in Brief

Norway Rebukes Dirty Dozen

Norway reprimanded diplomats from twelve countries that signed a diplomatic demarche against its whaling program, saying the protest letter contained “unfounded attacks” against its scientists. The 12 countries are: the United Kingdom, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Czech Republic, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain. The United States opted against joining the demarche because the text of the letter contained factual errors.

Desperate Campaigners

Greenpeace is working with racy web magazine, guymagazine.com to produce a series of articles highlighting the group's campaigns. The digital magazine mixes female nudity, saucy humor and militant environmentalism. Issue number four contains a feature on Japan's scientific research whaling program alongside revealing photographs of “eight of the hottest women in South Florida”. Greenpeace failed to generate publicity in the United States for its anti-whaling campaign when it held a high-tech press conference in Washington, DC in January. The next issue of the men's magazine will focus on Greenpeace's forests campaign, among other subjects. No word yet on how the new approach is going down with the group's female workers and supporters...

New Zealand Increases Hooker's Sea Lions By-Catch Limit

New Zealand Fisheries Minister Jim Anderton announced that he is increasing the annual by-catch limit for Hooker's sea lions from 97 to 150. The by-catch arises from squid fisheries. He said that the decision is consistent with the country's Biodiversity Strategy under which, “any harvesting is done in an informed, controlled and ecologically sustainable manner.” Green MP Metiria Turei told the Minister that, “it is inconsistent for the Government of which he is a part to be criticizing Norway and Japan for the hunting of minke whales while... he allows the increased slaughter of the Hooker's sea lion” which is less abundant.



Advert Targets Sakhalin Backer

An advert placed in the Washington Post by the Rainforest Action Network, Pacific Environment and Sakhalin Environment Watch claimed that

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ABN Amro, a Dutch banking concern, is “hypocritically” accepting an award for promotion of sustainable development while, at the same time, funding the Sakhalin II gas project which threatens western Pacific gray whales.

A February 2005 report commissioned by a subsidiary company of Royal Dutch Shell concluded that the whale population, numbering around 100 animals, could be threatened by the further development of the project in which it is the lead economic stakeholder. The question, they concluded, is not how to manage the risks but how to avoid them.

The project will impact the small western gray whale population in the region, which numbers around 100 animals, disturbing feeding grounds with seismic disturbance from exploration and drilling.

Scientists have predicted that this stock of gray whales may not survive the project which is described as the largest oil extraction project

in history. IWMC has said that Shell should organize the comprehensive east Asian strategy to conserve gray whales that its scientific panel recommended.

ABN Amro was awarded the World Environment Center’s 2006 Gold Medal Award for “International Corporate Achievement in Sustainable Development”.

Smuggled Elephant Ivory Recovered in Hong Kong

A shipment of 4 tons of elephant ivory was found hidden in a container ship that docked in Hong Kong. The shipment was confiscated after x-ray examination discovered the tusks stashed inside a container of timber. The ivory and the timber originated from the east African nation of Cameroon.

The successful confiscation of this ivory may discourage future smuggling efforts. Modern technology is increasingly being deployed to support the efforts to tackle illicit trade in elephant ivory.

Tuvalu Reaffirms Support for Sustainable Whaling

Tuvalu has said it will continue to support whaling nations in their quest to resume sustainable commercial whaling despite efforts by New Zealand Conservation Minister, Chris Carter, to persuade them that their environment and economy will be better served if it is prohibited. Carter’s visit took place shortly before the commencement of the annual IWC meeting in St. Kitts. Carter also announced plans to make similar overtures to Kiribati, Nauru and the Solomon Islands. ■

Noteworthy

The IWMC Tribune which will be published directly from the IWC 58th Annual Meeting in St. Kitts and Nevis will replace the June eNewsletter. It will be available on the IWMC website at www.iwmc.org ■

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