

Important moves for the world's forests

The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) met for the first time on 23–27 March at its new headquarters in Yokohama, Japan, and approved a survey of the world's surviving forests. The ITTO was set up by the United Nations Convention on Trade and Development to run the International Tropical Timber Agreement (ITTA), a 41-nation treaty with conservation ambitions. Ten years of negotiations between the timber producing and consuming nations took place before it was initiated in July 1986.

Many conservation groups see the ITTA as the best hope for government co-operation to save tropical forests, for although it is primarily a trade agreement, seeking to improve and rationalize market conditions for tropical hardwood trading, Article 1(h) of the Agreement states that one objective is 'to encourage the development of national policies aimed at sustainable utilization and conservation of tropical forests and their genetic resources, and at maintaining the ecological balance in the regions concerned'.

The ITTO approved 14 initiatives at its first meeting, the most important being the forest survey, but conservationists were disappointed that the discussion on a code of conduct for timber companies was postponed until November.

Also in March, just before the ITTO meeting, Friends of the Earth International and the World Wildlife Fund published a joint report, *A Hard Wood Story*. It calls for immediate action by the European tropical timber trade and European Economic Community (EEC) members to change discriminatory trade and aid policies that encourage the rapid destruction of tropical moist forests. The report says that European demand for tropical timber for industrial and domestic purposes, EEC tariffs on tropical hardwood imports and the activities of European logging companies all contribute to the unnecessary destruction of vast areas of forest in West Africa and South East Asia.

There is clear evidence that commercial logging causes the loss of 5 million ha (12.5 million acres)

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of tropical forest annually and that Europe accounts for 40 per cent of the volume of global trade in tropical hardwoods, being second only to Japan, which uses 48 per cent. The forests of Malaysia, the Philippines, the Ivory Coast and Gabon, which are among the five main suppliers of tropical hardwoods to the EEC, are classified by the World Bank as being in a critical condition due to commercial loggers.

A Hard Wood Story makes specific recommendations for European action. Two steps have already been taken in that the European Commission has recently accepted that a code of conduct for timber traders and active support for the ITTO are essential. Among the other recommendations are to list tree species endangered by commercial logging, especially mahoganies, under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and to create a Tropical Forest Fund for large-scale regeneration in degraded forests, for protecting threatened forest of high biological importance and for developing efficient and sustainable timber operations.

As Charles Secrett, Friends of the Earth International's Tropical Forest Co-ordinator, says: 'Instead of being part of the problem, Europeans could promote the solution by helping the world's poorer nations to manage their natural resources on a renewable basis. Consumers, traders, and politicians have the power to change things for the better. If we fail to act now, the consequences are truly appalling—for the wildlife of the forests, the hundreds of millions of people who depend on them and for the long-term interests of the timber trade.'

A Hard Wood Story: Europe's Involvement in the Tropical Timber Trade, by Francois Nectoux and Nigel Dudley, is available at £5.00 from FOE, 377 City Road, London EC1, UK.

Trouble for TEDs

Every year thousands of endangered and threatened marine turtles drown in the nets of shrimp fishermen off the eastern coasts of North America, from North Carolina to Texas. The number involved is enormous: 47,970 turtles are

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captured each year, according to estimates by the National Marine Fisheries Service, and of these 11,180 die. The Turtle Excluder Device (TED) was developed as a technological solution to this problem, but after six years of active promotion by governmental and private bodies, less than 1 per cent of US shrimp fishermen use it. It has been adopted elsewhere, for example the Indonesian Government requires its use in its waters, and the 1000 Japanese shrimp fishermen operating there have been using TEDs since 1982.

The lack of success in promoting voluntary use of TEDs and the increasing threat to the turtles, especially to the critically endangered Kemp's ridley turtle, led the Center for Environmental Education to take further action. It informed the Department of Commerce that the latter was violating the Endangered Species Act by neither closing the shrimp fishery nor requiring TEDs (the Act prohibits the capture of all five turtles found in US waters). As a result, representatives from the shrimp industry and the conservation community were invited to work together on an agreement, mediated by federal representatives. In December 1986 an agreement was finalized that calls for a three-year phase-in of the device in the US shrimp fishery, beginning 15 July 1987. The National Marine Fisheries Service has drafted a set of regulations bringing the agreement into force and there, in theory, the story should end—a successful conclusion as far as turtles are concerned.

Things are not so simple, however. A number of shrimp fishermen are opposed to the agreement and are doing all they can to stop the regulations being adopted and, unfortunately, are gaining the support of other industries and politicians. At the time of writing the results of the public hearings on the new regulations are not known, but it is expected that shrimp fishermen will use them to create momentum against the required use of TEDs. It is hard to understand the opposition. The fishermen say that TEDs are expensive, bulky, difficult to use, dangerous in stormy seas, and reduce the shrimp catch, but these objections do not hold up under scrutiny, and the real problem must lie much deeper—perhaps in a prejudice against having regulations of any kind forced upon them. It will be a tragedy for the turtles if

such prejudice prevents the implementation of this most equitable agreement.

Wildlife conservation in Saudi Arabia —hope and despair by Jonathan Kingdon

In February this year a symposium in Riyadh discussed conservation in Saudi Arabia in an international perspective. The symposium was momentous, because it represented a decisive first step in Saudi Arabia 'going public' over the country's growing environmental and conservation problems.

In an absolute monarchy all major initiatives come from the Royal Family. In this case the moving force has come from Prince Saud al Faisal, supported by King Fahd. As Director of the newly convened National Commission for Wildlife Conservation and Development (NCWCD), Prince Saud brought more than 30 Saudi scientists, officials and academics together with an equal number of scientists and conservationists from abroad. Most of the visitors were specialists with knowledge directly relevant to Saudi Arabia's immediate problems, but some were senior appointees from major conservation bodies. The mixture of disciplines and organizations reflected bold ambitions and a wide range of objectives for the symposium.

A major target for the Saudis was to gain expert advice in setting up a Conservation Action Plan under the NCWCD. This is, in effect, the first step towards a national conservation strategy, and Saudi Arabia sought international endorsement by inviting officials of UNEP, IUCN, WWF, ICBP, the International Institute for Environment and Development and the Commission for Environmental Policy Law and Administration. The symposium was managed by the Secretary General of the Commission, Dr Abdulaziz Abuzinada, who firmly put delegates to work on drawing up the Action Plan with much discussion on principles and priorities.

The Arabian oryx, houbara bustard and gazelles figure on the logo of the Commission; their disappearance from the wild is of real concern to the Saudis. They are symbols of local priorities in conservation, and their status and rehabilitation

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The flag designed for Saudi Arabia's conservation symposium in February 1987.

were a major preoccupation at the symposium. Inevitably the details of their management, captive breeding and health problems also received a high profile.

Whatever the symbolic importance of these species, threats to them extend out to innumerable other organisms. One delegate after another gave examples of the rapid decline of many animals and plants, indeed entire communities are under siege almost everywhere. The main threat comes from the over-large flocks, guns and axes of the Bedouins. Vehicles and mobile water tanks have given them almost total freedom to range all over their landscape. Their traditional grazing rights over entire regions have also made the founding of nature reserves or parks very difficult without massive efforts to buy their support. This has made identification of the key localities where Arabia's major biomes might be conserved rather academic. Even so, there was broad agreement that inventories of species and habitats were needed urgently, and that

some key areas should be declared and given meaningful protection.

The case for giving reserve status to particular localities was made by several delegates. One proposal excited widespread interest (partly because it had a real chance of being initiated promptly). This was to found a new terrestrial and marine national park in the Red Sea Farasan Islands. The islands have a very rich marine fauna and several land endemics, including the Farasan gazelle (which we were told faces imminent extinction at the hand of a single avid hunter, an Emir from the mainland). If the proposal materialized, Farasan would have a research programme and centre, and would become Saudi Arabia's second national park. It should have more substance than the first, Asir, which, like a British national park, is content to provide picnic spots and other minor facilities.

The two major organizations concerned with conservation and the environment in Saudi Arabia, NCWCD and the Meteorology and

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Environmental Protection Agency (MEPA), had an important forum at the symposium. Both advertised their determination to initiate action. That determination represents a new commitment to the environment and conservation by the leading Arab Nation. Given Saudi Arabia's financial resources, that should be good news and fresh cause for hope. The bad news lay in the despair of field workers describing whole plant and animal communities disappearing before their eyes. The Action Plan will need to become action without delay or it will not be houbara or gazelles but their gilded cages that become symbols—of opportunities lost.

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New marine national park proposed for Brazil by Susan Wells

The archipelago of Fernando de Noronha lies about 195 nautical miles east of Natal, off the north-east coast of Brazil. It consists of a main island, Fernando de Noronha (17 sq km in area and 321 m in altitude), and 16 smaller islands. The main island is surrounded by steep cliffs and has no permanent sources of freshwater, although three seasonal streams flow in the rainy season.

Recent research has shown that it is rich in wildlife. At least 11 species of seabird nest on the islands, including the magnificent frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* and several tern and booby species, and there are two endemic land birds *Vireo gracilirostris* and *Elaenia ridleyana*. There is a resident population of 300–400 spinner dolphins that congregate in the Baía dos Dolfinos and permit divers to swim with them. The archipelago was probably once an important nesting site for the green turtle *Chelonia mydas*, but this species has already been affected by human activity and now only about 20 females nest annually on the main island. The hawksbill *Eretmochelys imbricata* is seen in the surrounding waters, but does not nest. There is a diverse fish fauna and, although there are no true reefs, a rich coral fauna has been found similar to that of the better known, nearby Atol das Rocas; more

than 20 coral species have been described. The coral and reef-associated fauna of Brazil is notable for its high level of endemism, compared with other countries in the western Atlantic. This is probably a result of its isolation from the Caribbean, the silt-laden waters of the Orinoco and Amazon forming a barrier 2700 km wide.

The islands are coming under threat from erosion caused by poor land management for agriculture and cattle grazing, and by construction work carried out by the military. Of even greater potential impact are the plans by the EMFA, the joint Administration of the Armed Forces, which administers the archipelago, to expand the tourist industry. At present there are about 100 visitors weekly who arrive on charter flights from São Paulo and can be accommodated in a small hotel. A rapid increase in tourists without considering the environmental implications could be disastrous; littering is already causing problems.

In response to these concerns, a Comitê Pró-Parque Nacional Marinho de Fernando de Noronha was formed to lobby for careful management of the islands before development occurs too rapidly. Since their campaign started, some 125 non-governmental organizations in 21 countries, including the FFPS, the US National Wildlife Federation, and the American Ornithologists' Union, and over 5000 individuals have written to encourage the Brazilian Government to establish a national park in the archipelago. The committee is surveying the flora and fauna of the archipelago with assistance from the Brazilian National Museum, and turtle nesting is being monitored by IBDF (Instituto Brasileiro de Desenvolvimento Florestal). Two TV films concerning the island have been shown nationally and a film on the dolphins is being distributed in several countries.

An 'Environmental Protection Area' covering all the islands was declared in June 1986, but has no practical legal value. The establishment of a national park would mean that a management plan would be drawn up by IBDF to provide full protection for wildlife while taking tourism and the recreational potential of the islands into consideration. A law enforcement group could

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Boldro Beach, Fernando de Noronha; one of the areas most affected by litter left by tourists (R.W. Coffin).

be formed and an interpretive centre and nature trails established. Discussions are under way between the Minister-in-Chief of EMFA and officials of IBDF, but no steps have yet been taken. Further letters of support have been requested, addressed directly to the President,* urging him to designate the national park immediately. The adjacent Atol de las Rocas was established as a biological reserve in 1979, in recognition of its scientific importance. Currently the only marine national park in Brazil is the Parque Nacional Marinho dos Abrolhos, to the south off the coast of Bahia State.

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Further information is available from José Truda Palazzo Jr, Executive Co-ordinator, Comitê Pró-Parque Nacional Marinho de Fernando de Noronha, Rua 24 de Outubro, 1000/2301, Porto Alegre, RS 90460, Brazil.

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Grey seals and fishermen: another conservation conflict for Canada? by Kieran Mulvaney

The Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans has long allowed fishermen to shoot any 'pest' grey seals *Halichoerus grypus* that they find damaging their gear. Indeed, on receipt of each offending pinniped's jaw, the department pays a bounty of up to \$50. The one thing it does not allow is organized culling or any other activity specifically designed to reduce grey seal numbers.

For the fishermen of Nova Scotia, this arrangement is no longer sufficient. Concerned that the grey seal population on the Canadian East Coast is growing out of control and causing unprecedented damage to the Atlantic fishing industry, they are pressing the Federal Government to sanction an assault on the seals' primary breeding grounds on Sable Island in an attempt to

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reduce their estimated 75,000–100,000 population by around 40 per cent.

The fishermen perceive that the seals pose a threat to their livelihood on three main fronts. Firstly, they say, the seals have voracious appetites and eat as much as 40 kg (88 lbs) of fish each day. Secondly, they claim that seals cause more than \$1-million worth of damage to fishing gear annually. Thirdly, they assert that grey seals transmit a parasitic nematode, commonly known as codworm, which ends up in the flesh of cod and other fish. The codworm is not harmful to humans and dies when the fish it parasitizes is cooked, but processors lose money when they have to reject or de-worm infested fillets.

All told, the Royal Commission on Seals and Sealing estimated that grey seals cost the East Coast fishing industry between \$60 million and \$115 million annually. And the only way to reduce that figure, say the fishermen, is to implement a seal cull. To this end, local, provincial and national media crews were taken out on to the water in July of last year, where they saw two members of the Eastern Fishermen's Federation (EFF) staging a demonstration hunt of grey seals off Cape Breton. The demonstration was intended to prove to politicians and public alike that not only was a large-scale cull necessary, but that it could be conducted humanely. However, the demonstration also attracted the attention of scientists and conservationists, who pointed out a number of flaws in the fishermen's arguments.

Writing in *Canadian Geographic* magazine, Dr David Lavigne, an associate professor at the University of Guelph, stated that an adult grey seal requires approximately 10,000 kilo-calories of energy a day. This translates into about 5 kg of fish—just one-eighth the amount claimed by the fishermen. Consequently, any loss in revenue that there may be as a result of competition with seals is much less significant than the EFF has asserted. 'Furthermore', wrote Lavigne, 'it is implicitly assumed that a grey seal cull will result in larger catches, and thus a greater economic return, for the fishermen. These are naively optimistic assumptions. Marine ecosystems and fishery economics are far more complex than that' (Lavigne, 1986).

Conservationists agree with the EFF that seals can and do cause damage to gear, but launching an all-out assault on the seals, they say, is not the way to solve the problem. Culling programmes are expensive, result in adverse publicity, and cannot guarantee to remove the specific seals responsible. They argue that it would be far better to institute a reimbursement programme or insurance, and to eliminate, if necessary, individual 'problem' seals found around the fishing gear.

There is no consensus on the codworm issue. While fishermen cite it as a major reason for culling seals, critics of a cull point out that, in a recent, extensive review of the problems faced by East Coast Fisheries, codworm was not even mentioned. There is, in any case, no simple relationship between the number of grey seals and the number of infested fish, and no scientific evidence to suggest that the killing of seals would reduce the incidence of the parasite. Undeterred, the pro-culling faction has unilaterally rechristened codworm 'sealworm' and has stepped up pressure on the Federal Government to support a reduction in grey seal numbers.

The Government is now faced with a difficult decision. If it refuses to sanction a cull, then it will doubtless come in for a political hammering at home. On the other hand, if it accedes to the fishermen's demands, it will run the considerable risk of exposing Canada to another, potentially damaging, international campaign, just four years after its long defence of the Newfoundland harp sealers ended in acrimonious defeat.

Such renewed conflict would be in nobody's best interests. And, if our present scientific knowledge is anything to go by, at the end of the day Nova Scotia's discontented fishermen would be most unlikely to be any better off than they are now.

Reference

Lavigne D.M. 1986 Killing 40,000 grey seals won't improve the fishing. *Canadian Geographic*, **106** (5), 73.

Leading conservationist efforts to prevent a grey seal cull are the International Wildlife Coalition, 320 Gifford St., Falmouth MA 02540, USA, and its British partner, Care for the Wild, 26 North St., Horsham, W. Sussex RH12 1BN, UK.

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