

# Conservation news

## First national conservation strategy for the pygmy hippopotamus in Liberia

The Endangered pygmy hippopotamus *Choeropsis liberiensis* is one of the least known mammals. It is hunted for its meat and its habitat has been severely reduced by wide-scale deforestation, resulting in a serious population decline. With a highly restricted range in the Upper Guinea rainforest of West Africa, Liberia is one of its last strongholds.

Recognizing the need for urgent and coordinated action, Liberia has become the first country to develop a national strategy for the conservation of the pygmy hippo. A workshop, co-organized by Fauna & Flora International and the Forestry Development Authority of Liberia, and funded by the Flagship Species Fund and BHP Billiton, was held in Monrovia in December 2012. Attended by 25 participants, including representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, the national police service, the private sector, civil society and international NGOs, the workshop built on the 2011 framework Regional Action Plan to produce the first National Conservation Strategy for the pygmy hippopotamus.

The Strategy, finalized on 1 July 2013, follows the Species Conservation Strategy process developed by the IUCN Species Survival Commission Species Planning Subcommittee. It provides an up-to-date assessment of the conservation status of the pygmy hippo and its habitat in Liberia, outlines current threats and identifies critical activities needed to address them. It also identifies the bodies and organizations central to ensuring these activities are implemented effectively.

Stakeholders in Liberia are committed in their efforts to work towards a vision in which viable populations of pygmy hippos thrive throughout their range in healthy ecosystems, acting as a flagship species for the Upper Guinea Forest, coexisting in harmony with human populations, and retaining cultural importance for the benefit of present and future generations. This new Conservation Strategy will support the stakeholders to coordinate current and future conservation work and provide a mechanism for a regular monitoring of progress.

CHLOE HODGKINSON *Fauna & Flora International, Cambridge, UK. E-mail chloe.hodgkinson@fauna-flora.org*

DAVID MALLON *Division of Biology and Conservation Ecology, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK*

TINA VOGT *Fauna & Flora International, Monrovia, Liberia*

CHRIS RANSOM *Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London, UK*

## A non-native population of the Critically Endangered Sulawesi crested black macaque persists on the island of Bacan

The Sulawesi crested black macaque *Macaca nigra* is a Critically Endangered primate found naturally only on the northern peninsula of Sulawesi, Indonesia. The species has undergone an apparent decline of > 80%, attributed to habitat loss and hunting, since the first surveys were undertaken in the 1970s. The IUCN Red List assessment excludes an introduced population on the island of Bacan in the North Maluku archipelago.

Black macaques have been reported from Bacan, c. 300 km from North Sulawesi, since the mid 1800s. Although there has been speculation about the origin of this population, it has generally been concluded, based on morphology, that this macaque species is *M. nigra* (*American Journal of Primatology*, 15, 487–493). A survey in 1994 estimated a density of 170 individuals per km<sup>2</sup> in Gunung Sibela Nature Reserve and 133 km<sup>-2</sup> in unprotected logged forest near the village of Wayamiga (*American Journal of Primatology*, 44, 89–106).

We visited Bacan in February 2013 to assess the current status of the population and identify potential threats to its persistence. We conducted 18 reconnaissance walks (a total of 80 km) in the forests of the central portion of the island, including Gunung Sibela Nature Reserve. Our surveys predominantly sampled secondary forest interspersed with crops (coconut, cocoa, banana and vegetables), and primary forest (often at higher altitude). We recorded frequent signs of logging and clearance for crop production, although it was difficult to establish the legality of such activities as the boundaries between village land, protected forest and protected areas were unclear. We also interviewed 200 people from five nearby villages to quantify their use of forest resources and their attitudes towards the macaque and its habitat.

We encountered macaques on all but two reconnaissance walks, with an overall group encounter rate of 3.5 km<sup>-2</sup>. Although our methods are not directly comparable to those of surveys in the 1990s, this rate is lower than that previously reported for Bacan (6.8 km<sup>-2</sup>) but higher than that for North Sulawesi (2.7 km<sup>-2</sup>). The majority of encounters were visual and the macaques exhibit those morphological traits considered diagnostic for *M. nigra*, including the crest of hair and pink heart-shaped bottom (reports with photographs are available at [www.selamatkanyaki.com](http://www.selamatkanyaki.com)).

Most people interviewed did not consume macaques (93%), although we observed that young macaques were kept as pets in three villages. The majority of people interviewed demonstrated positive attitudes towards forests and the