

brought together 48 scientists and resource managers from all over Asia — including Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, and Japan. An outcome of that initiative has been the informal *Asian Conservation Network* which functions with its secretariat at the Centre.

Besides the above major training programmes and pertinent activities there have been several ecodeve-

lopment and Nature camps conducted by the Centre in the rural areas of the Western Ghats.

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USSR Becomes IUCN's Fifty-fourth Nation-state Member

The Soviet Union became IUCN's 54th state member in April of this year*, and the first from the eastern European region. Approval for membership was sought and obtained from all fifteen Republics of the USSR — a notable achievement in a time of ethnic tension and nationalist sentiment, demonstrating once more that concern for the environment has the power to bring people together to achieve shared goals. It is, however, not so surprising in a country where opinion polls consistently show that the environment is a major source of public concern.

In spite of media concentration on the dark side of the Soviet environment, its vast region contains many species and habitats that have all but disappeared from western Europe, and wildlands that are hard to find anywhere else. IUCN hopes to be able to cooperate with its new State

member in formulating and implementing policies and strategies that conserve the rich natural heritage while at the same time allowing and even encouraging non-destructive economic development.

An IUCN National Committee will be formed in the USSR, representing all its Republics and the scientific and conservation community, and will embark on development of a joint programme with IUCN. The first meeting of the Committee is scheduled for the autumn of 1991. A Secretariat to service the Committee and coordinate IUCN–Soviet activities will be established in the All-Union Institute for Nature Protection and Reserves, Moscow, USSR.

Meanwhile, the IUCN East European Programme and its partners in the Soviet Union have not been idle, and the third and last volume of national environmental status reports, which covers the European USSR, is in press and will be published shortly.

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* A notice at the time indicated that 'The Soviet decision was communicated to the Union by Dr Vladimir Sakharov, Head of International Relations of the Ministry for Nature Conservation and Environmental Protection of the USSR, [when he was] attending a meeting in Geneva ... of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. The United States also [only] recently joined the World Conservation Union as a state member.' — Ed.

Leading Champions of Wildlife Lost to Dastardly Acts

With, surely, the rest of the civilized world, the International Society of Naturalists (INSONA) deeply mourns the brutal assassination, under the most extraordinarily tragic circumstances, of the former Prime Minister and former Chairman of the Indian Board for Wildlife, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, on 21 May 1991. It is a sad loss indeed to the environmental and wildlife conservation movement in the Indian subcontinent.

Shri Rajiv Gandhi helped in our crusade to save the habitat of *Antelope cervicapra* — the endangered Blackbuck (Gaekwad & Oza, 1988). Earlier, in our endeavours to save the Kashmir Deer (*Cervus elaphus hanglu*), popularly known as the Hangul, from the brink of extinction, the late Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi, as the then Chairperson of the Indian Board for Wildlife had graciously extended support (Oza, 1987). She also helped in my attempts to have the Silent Valley recognized as a World Heritage Site (Oza, 1981; Venkateswaran & Polunin, 1984).

India achieved several conservation successes during the time when Indira and then Rajiv Gandhi served as the Prime Ministers of the world's second most populous country. Nature lovers and conservationists described that period as '*now or never*' for serving the cause of wildlife conservation. So altogether it is a multiply shocking tragedy that earlier the Mother, and then recently the Son, who both rendered paramount services to *save* Indian

wildlife, have been done to *death* in the most tragic and barbaric circumstances, when the Nation needed their services the most.

Smt. Indira Gandhi's tragic end came on 31 October 1984, in New Delhi, in her Prime Minister's residence at the treacherous hands of her own armed bodyguards. Campaigning intensively and extensively during the 1991 Indian election, her only surviving Son, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, travelled almost everywhere freely, mixed among the masses fearlessly, even sweeping aside the security shields, warnings, and obstacles.

He lost his precious life to brutal, dare-devil assassination on 21 May 1991 in Sriperumbudur (Kancheepuram taluk, Chengai-Anna district, on the Madras–Bangalore highway). The latest intelligence reports which appeared in the Press reveal that the disastrous end could have occurred elsewhere during the campaign if the assassin(s) failed to strike the death-blow near Madras.

Shri Rajiv Gandhi was annihilated, on that fateful night in Sriperumbudur, by the suicide mission of the 'belt-bomb' woman, who, it is believed, waited to garland him. Eye-witnesses narrated that she could have bent forward with an intention to touch his feet — as a mark of respect — and consequently could have activated a timer, triggering the explosion. The woman, it is reported, had tied the 'live bomb' belt to her back.

Before leaving this ungrateful world for ever, at 10.10 p.m. (local time), Shri Rajiv had arrived at a statue of his late Mother, near the venue of the meeting. He garlanded the statue mere minutes before his death; talked to people, and drove to the final destination of meeting to receive garlands and shawls from his numerous admirers. Then the worst-ever blast in local memory devoured the youngest, the most handsome, and surely one of the most globally-admired, of statesmen who above all was the champion of wildlife.

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MSc in Conservation Biology, FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, South Africa

The Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, Department of Zoology, University of Cape Town, South Africa, is introducing a full-year Master of Science course in Conservation Biology. Its aim is to produce conservation biologists who are able to contribute effectively to the preservation of biotic diversity and to the sustainable utilization of renewable natural resources in an environmentally and politically dynamic continent. The academic entry requirement is a four-years' BSc degree or a three-years' BSc Honours degree, and it is expected that students will range from the newly-qualified to practising, experienced conservation biologists.

The emphasis of the course is to provide students with a sound scientific basis for future decision-making concerning the preservation of biodiversity. Topics to be covered in the course range from the demographic, ecological, biogeographical, and genetic, aspects of theoretical conservation biology, to the effective implementation of active conservation planning and management. Considering that conservation biology is a synthetic discipline which integrates diverse fields, the MSc course has been divided into the following 11 modules:

1. Biodiversity
2. Modelling in nature conservation
3. Demography of wild populations
4. Minimum Viable Populations (MVPs)
5. Genetics of wild species
6. Monitoring and time-series analysis
7. Community-level interactions
8. Invasive alien organisms
9. Disturbance ecology
10. Landscape ecology and the use of Geographic Information Systems (GISs)
11. Decision-making in conservation management.

Each of these modules will be taught by a specialist, and will extend for a period of from one to three weeks. Specialists have been drawn from both the local and

international scientific communities. The international scientists involved in 1992 will include Professor M.E. Gilpin, of the University of California at San Diego (modules 2–4), and Professor C. Wissel, of Philipps-Universität, Marburg, Germany (module 2), and Dr D.T. Parkin, of the University of Nottingham, England (module 5). Each module will be structured into three components: an introduction, formal lectures, and a final synthesis. The introductory component will involve preparatory reading and organized discussion sessions, whereas the formal lecture component will provide time for an in-depth examination of contentious issues. The synthesis component will require essays, seminars, and related assignments to be submitted by students.

In addition to the abovementioned modules, the course involves a mini-research thesis. Research topics will relate to each student's particular field of interest, and will require the application of advanced conservation theory and techniques in that field. A period of two months will be dedicated solely to the research thesis.

The MSc will be offered for the first time in 1992 and will commence on February 3 with the final module finishing at the end of November. Students will complete their research thesis during December 1992 and January 1993. The registration fee will be about R3,200 in 1992 (about US\$1,150).

A handbook describing the course, each module, and possible funding sources, can be obtained from the Director, FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.

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