

# Conservation news

## First commercial timber harvest from a community-managed forest in Tanzania

After over 20 years of policy development and implementation the first commercial timber harvest has taken place in a community-managed forest in Tanzania. The timber was felled during September and November 2009 in a Village Land Forest Reserve managed by Kikole village in Kilwa District, south-east Tanzania. This forest is covered under a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate—the first for a community-managed natural forest in the whole of Africa. Kikole were assisted in this endeavour by the Mpingo Conservation Project, an FFI partner, which also administers the FSC certificate on behalf of member communities.

Kikole received a payment of TZS 2,400,000 (c. USD 1,800) in return for 15 m<sup>3</sup> of African blackwood *Dalbergia melanoxylon*. Previously the community would only have received TZS 100 (USD 0.08) per log. In all Kikole were able to realize an income nearly 400 times more than they would have received previously on the 63 logs sold. Kikole intend to spend the money they have raised on improving the road to the village, improving market access for impoverished farmers and providing local employment.

The harvest, whilst being a considerable achievement, is the start of a long process from forest to completed product. Other community forestry projects around the world (*Small-scale Forest Economics, Management and Policy*, 2, 327–341) have struggled because the timber available has not met market demands. Issues can include species, wood quality, quality of sawing, and quantity. Mpingo Conservation Project, and its partners Environment Africa Trust and FFI, have therefore worked to address these concerns from early on in the project. Funding came from the Darwin Initiative, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, WWF and Comic Relief.

African blackwood is exported to developed countries in the form of sawn billets to make musical instruments—an industry that is extremely demanding in terms of quality such that often > 90% of timber entering a sawmill is wasted (15 m<sup>3</sup> of logs is sufficient to make c. 1,000 clarinets and oboes). Mpingo Conservation Project and its partners resolved this issue by partnering with an existing sawmill in Tanzania, Sandali Wood Industries, who already operate profitably in this market and have a reputation for delivering high quality products. Sandali Wood Industries' management was open to the idea of collaborating in a scheme with significant potential environmental and social benefits and succeeded in obtaining a Chain of Custody certificate from FSC.

Meanwhile, in the UK, Environment Africa Trust and FFI investigated the supply chains and market opportuni-

ties involved in delivering blackwood to British and Irish musical instrument manufacturers, and the subsequent retailing of woodwind instruments. Potential partner manufacturers were identified and approached, leading to the first orders for FSC-certified blackwood in December 2009. Environment Africa Trust are providing technical assistance to partner manufacturers through the process of obtaining their own Chain of Custody certificates from FSC, which will allow manufacturers and their retail partners to sell the final product under an FSC label. The billets will need to be properly seasoned, a process that takes at least 1 year. It is therefore anticipated that the first FSC-certified blackwood instruments will be on sale mid 2011.

To kick-start the market in a new product line no price premium was attached to the timber by Kikole, and Sandali Wood Industries expect to sell the sawn billets with no, or minimal, mark-up on their normal prices. However, once the first certified instruments reach the market, Environment Africa Trust and partners will launch a marketing campaign under the banner Sound and Fair to convince musicians of the merits of buying FSC-certified instruments. Market research suggests that, once the issues have been explained to them, musicians are prepared to pay 5–25% more for ethically labelled instruments. On high end instruments that commonly retail in excess of USD 5,000 this will yield substantial additional income for collaborating sawmills, manufacturers and retailers. For villages such as Kikole, who could eventually earn USD 40,000 per year or more on sales of African blackwood, the returns will amply justify the investment in the project. For more information see <http://www.mpingoconservation.org>

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## Rediscovery of the Taveuni blind snake

Much of the herpetofauna of the two main Fijian Islands (Viti Levu and Vanua Levu) has been decimated by human-induced habitat modifications and the introduction of exotic predators. Cats, rats and mongooses are the major predators on terrestrial reptiles and on those arboreal species that frequently descend to the ground for feeding or movement. The mongoose is a major driver of extinction or near extinction. Its level of lizard predation is readily seen by contrasting the density of the ground-living white-bellied striped skink *Emoia cyanura* on Viti Levu (mongoose present) and Ovalau (mongoose free): < 5 individuals ha<sup>-1</sup> versus > 1,300 individuals ha<sup>-1</sup>, respectively.

Of Fiji's three native terrestrial snakes the elapid *Ogmodon vitianus* occurs only on Viti Levu, and is strongly subterranean. The Pacific boa *Candoia bibroni* is moderately abundant on many mongoose-free islands and survives only at very low densities on islands with the mongoose, in well forested areas where presumably it is nearly fully arboreal.

The situation for the blind snake is enigmatic. The original report derives from the Secretary's report of the 27 October 1897 meeting of the Linnean Society of New South Wales. Therein, he reported that "Mr Edgar R. Waite exhibited (1) examples of *Typhlops aluensis*, Blgr., from Wai Obi, Vuna Pi [Waioba, Vuna District], Fiji, where they are known to the natives as 'Naota'". No additional specimens of *T. aluensis* (now a synonym of *Ramphotyphlops depressus*) have been reported from Fiji since then, and no subsequent detailed description of Waite's specimens confirms the validity of the Secretary's report. Because Mr Waite had an avid interest in blind snakes and was employed by the Australian Museum (AMS), the voucher specimens should reside in that collection. Glen Shea, a research associate at the museum, reported the presence of three AMS register entries for '*Typhlops* sp.' from the above locality. However, one specimen was destroyed and the other two cannot be located.

In 1998 a report of a blind snake in suburban Suva, Viti Levu, led to the discovery of a recently introduced population of the parthenogenetic blind snake, *Ramphotyphlops braminus* (otherwise known as the flowerpot snake). *R. braminus* is now common in the Suva area, although it has not yet been reported elsewhere in Fiji.

One of us (DW) has persisted in the belief that in the absence of the mongoose the blind snake reported by Waite should still occur on Taveuni. In 2006 a comment by a Taveuni resident living close to Waioba offered the first substantial evidence that the Waite-reported blind snake is a valid record and survives. Encouragement by DW led to the securing of a specimen and confirmation that the Waioba blind snake was not *R. braminus*. An immediate search by DW was unsuccessful. However, local knowledge of a burrowing snake was widespread and was sufficient to encourage the offer of a reward for specimens. This offer resulted in nine specimens (USNM 558260-268) collected during 2008–2009. Their arrival at the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, USA) in June 2009 allows us to confirm that the Taveuni blind snakes are *Ramphotyphlops* (based on the presence of retrocloacal sacs and coiled retracted hemipenes in USNM 558264) and can be inferred to be the species reported by Waite in 1897. The Taveuni blind snake, however, is not *R. depressus*, which occurs in the Solomon Islands. Its morphology indicates it is an endemic species and a member of the *Ramphotyphlops flaviventer* group, differing from *R. depressus* by the presence of a well-defined longitudinal dorsal stripe in contrast to the indistinct stripe

in *R. depressus*. Other traits support the uniqueness of the Taveuni population.

The flowerpot snake has proved to be an extremely successful invader and now has a near pantropical distribution in disturbed habitats. It usually travels to new localities in root masses of ornamental plants and, being parthenogenetic, a single individual can establish a new population. Presently there is no evidence that its presence threatens the survival of native blind snakes. However, its possible translocation to Taveuni adds another conservation concern for the native Fijian snakes.

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### CCF Symposium January 2010

The Annual Symposium of the Cambridge Conservation Forum (CCF; <http://www.cambridgeconservationforum.org.uk/>) was held on 8 January 2010, a seemingly inauspicious date, but in reality getting to Murray Edwards College on that day entailed a snow-bound, numb-fingered cycle ride. Happily the first talk carried the audience beyond the icy conditions into the realm of crystal ball-gazing, as Bill Sutherland described some of the emerging big issues for conservationists, including microplastic pollution and large-scale international land acquisitions, as identified through a horizon-scanning programme at the University of Cambridge. The forward-looking aspect of the new decade was further endorsed by Peter Herkenrath, who outlined some of the key events occurring this year under the auspices of the International Year of Biodiversity and emphasized the opportunities engendered by this Year, such as the chance to promote biodiversity among the wider public. A later talk returned, in passing, to the significance of the Year, with a discussion on biodiversity indicators.

Consideration of the future, for conservationists at least, inevitably brings the spectre of climate change to the fore, so Humphrey Crick's discourse on how we should plan for a warmer climate, in the face of 'global weirding', was salutary. The current interest in ecosystem-scale conservation should provide more resilience than the previous conservation paradigms of species protection or nature reserves, although questions such as how to assess the health and resilience of an ecosystem, as well as the importance of connectivity and permeability in habitat networks, still require attention. Climate change was further dealt with in the informative mini-round table (disappointingly held along a rectangular table rather than an undersized piece of furniture) entitled REDD: climate solution or red herring? The three speakers during this session provided a concise and clear account of the Copenhagen conference, a call for

a slow, structured approach towards REDD that does not burden capacity in the countries in which the scheme operates, and an example of a REDD project in Cambodia's Seima Forest (see Briefly, this issue).

In addition to climate change, agriculture also featured in a number of presentations. Matt Shardlow's talk illustrated the gaps in our knowledge about pollinators. Many invertebrates linked to pollination show alarming declines in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, with declines linked to the use of pesticides, intensification of agriculture and habitat destruction. On a more positive note, Francis Shaxson put forward a convincing case for the use of conservation agriculture as a way of combating the negative effects of conventional tillage agriculture. He pointed out the similarity between the roots of the words ecology (from the Greek *oikos*, meaning house) and husbandry (from the Old Norse, *hús* meaning house, and *bóni*, occupier and tiller of the soil).

In keeping with other CCF Symposia the topics covered ranged widely, from local wetlands under restoration (The Great Fen Project, a few miles north-west of Cambridge) and the conservation of British herpetofauna to talks about British Overseas Territories and Marine Important Bird Areas. Over and above this magical mystery tour of the conservation world, the message that comes through most strongly from these annual Symposia is the wealth of knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm that Cambridge harbours. With the continuing development of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative (<http://www.conservation.cam.ac.uk/>), of which CCF is a founding member, this wealth will be capitalized on for many years.

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### Conserving the Critically Endangered greater bamboo lemur

The greater bamboo lemur *Prolemur simus* is the only recognized species in its genus. It is considered one of the most threatened primates and is probably the most threatened lemur. It is endemic to Madagascar and, although subfossil records show it was once widely distributed across the island, it is now believed to be restricted to a small part of the remaining eastern rainforest and a few outlying degraded forest fragments. In 2007 only 60 individuals were known in the wild and 22 in captivity (*Primate Conservation*, 23, 5–17).

In June 2009 an agreement was signed with the Malagasy government creating The Aspinall Foundation's Madagascar Programme, with the mission to work with local partners for the conservation of threatened species and their habitats. The initial focus of the programme has been to play a key role in ensuring that effective actions are implemented to assure the long-term persistence of the greater bamboo lemur.

Several objectives were identified: facilitating communication and collaboration, surveying for new sites supporting the species, ensuring effective conservation management of known sites in both the remaining forest corridors and in isolated habitats, and, when appropriate, ensuring the survival of individuals in sites that cannot be protected through translocation or captive breeding.

Progress so far has been in the surveying of new sites. Previous surveys, between 1986 and 2007, confirmed the presence of greater bamboo lemurs at only 11 of 70 sites surveyed (*Primate Conservation*, 23, 5–17). However, it appeared that large areas within the species' range had not been surveyed and therefore some of these were targeted for rapid collaborative surveys. The first was undertaken between November 2008 and May 2009 within the Fandriana-Vondrozo Corridor, the southern portion of the eastern rainforest belt, with GERP (the Madagascar Primate Group) and Centre ValBio. Only a single *Prolemur* feeding sign was found and there was one potential but unconfirmed sighting of the species.

In the second survey, undertaken between May and September 2009 in partnership with GERP, Conservation International and Association Mitsinjo (a local community-based conservation organization), evidence of greater bamboo lemurs was found at several sites in the Ankeniheny-Zahamena Corridor, in the central region of the eastern rainforest. The success of this survey was probably due to the fact that many local communities there are organized into associations and have management responsibility for forests in this region, and thus community members most likely to have knowledge of bamboo lemurs could be targeted for information gathering in a way that was not feasible in the first survey. We would now like to search further north, to try to find the northern limit of the species' range, and also in the region connecting the areas of the first two surveys, from where no *Prolemur* has yet been confirmed but from where we have convincing information from local people about their probable presence.

Although clearly we still have a lot to learn about the distribution and abundance of this species, the second survey has demonstrated that the Ankeniheny-Zahamena Corridor can now be considered a priority area for the conservation of the species, in addition to the southern Fandriana-Vondrozo Corridor. Both Corridors are in the process of being established as protected areas for which local communities will take on an important management role. Various organizations are now developing strategies to ensure the conservation of the greater bamboo lemur within and around both Corridors.

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## North Negros Natural Park—first insight into the forest interior

A recent expedition to the interior forest of North Negros Natural Park (formerly the North Negros Forest Reserve) in the central Philippines has reconfirmed its importance for endemic and threatened biodiversity. On Negros Island < 5% of old growth rainforest remains. The montane and submontane forests of the Park are now the largest remaining area of wet evergreen rainforest on Negros and the second largest in the West Visayan Faunal region. However, they are under continuing threat from illegal logging, hunting and encroaching agriculture.

Conservation of many sites in the Philippines has been hampered by a paucity of scientific data. North Negros Natural Park is one such area. Although it has received the attention of Coral Cay Conservation, Silliman University, the Philippine Endemic Species Conservation Project, Cambridge University, and others, all have worked on the periphery of the Park. None, to our knowledge, have undertaken work in the forest interior.

In April 2009 the Negros Interior Biodiversity Expedition (supported by the Negros Forests and Ecological Foundation, Inc.) completed the first rapid biological exploration of the forest interior, which lies between Mount Mandalagan and Mount Silay. The interior is a raised plateau of primary forest at an altitude of c. 1,500 m. The team completed a c. 35-km transect across the Park, making important discoveries across a range of taxa. Although bird surveys did not document any new records, 40% of all species recorded are endemic. The presence of the Visayan spotted deer *Rusa alfredi*, one of the world's rarest deer, was reconfirmed and the species recorded at multiple locations. Other notable records included the Critically Endangered Visayan warty pig *Sus cebifrons*. As with the spotted deer this species is endemic to West Visayan, persisting only in the remaining forest fragments of Negros and Panay.

The expedition results also indicate that the Park supports populations of many other endemic and/or threatened species. The capture of the Philippine pygmy fruit bat *Haplonycteris fischeri* is important because its population has declined. This species and *S. cebifrons* are also listed as EDGE (Evolutionarily Distinct, Globally Endangered) species by the Zoological Society of London, who supported the expedition. The musky fruit bat *Ptenochirus jagori*, which is widespread and common in lowland forest but uncommon in montane forest and usually absent in mossy forest, was also observed in the interior. Another noteworthy discovery was the endemic, Endangered Hazel's forest frog *Platymantis hazelae*, which we recorded with high frequency and in multiple colour forms. Although known from other locations in Negros, there appears to be no previous published account of its occurrence in the Park.

A preliminary plant inventory for Gymnospermae and Angiospermae revealed the presence of the threatened lady slipper orchid *Paphiopedilum ciliolare*, extending its localized range from four islands to five. Other noteworthy finds include the discovery of *Alocasia* sp. (Araceae) and *Antidesma* sp. (Phyllanthaceae), both as yet unidentified, and three other Critically Endangered *Alocasia* species native to the Philippines. Only three *Alocasia* species have been assessed for the IUCN Red List and they are all Critically Endangered and native to the Philippines.

Previous biodiversity assessments on the edges of North Negros Natural Park highlighted the relative importance of the area and the threats of illegal logging and hunting. The assessment by the Negros Interior Biodiversity Expedition suggests the interior may be a stronghold for a range of threatened and endemic species. The IUCN has stressed a need for the designation of the remaining rainforests of Negros as protected areas. The relative inaccessibility of the forest interior of the Park makes it a candidate for greater conservation effort.

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## Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Parana, Brazil

Conservation of valuable landscapes and mainstreaming biodiversity into the rural economy have been much debated but there is little information from the field. However, the State of Parana, Brazil, recently carried out a Global Environment Facility-funded World Bank-implemented project that has provided information about mainstreaming biodiversity at the landscape scale as well as integration of biodiversity conservation philosophy at the governmental level.

The Parana Biodiversity Project was a 7-year programme (2002–2009) with the aim of consolidating three biodiversity corridors in the Brazilian Atlantic and Araucaria Forests, both globally important forest areas. These Forests are internationally recognized as important repositories of biodiversity but are severely threatened by deforestation and forest fragmentation. The Project also aimed to establish biodiversity management models that would assist stakeholders in organizing conservation

activities throughout the State. The three corridors, with an estimated population of c. 300,000 people, cover an area of c. 2 million ha and include seven state protected areas, 280 micro-catchments (small topographical planning units) and 63 municipalities.

An important aspect of the Project was to emphasize inter-agency and inter-community interactions, including capacity building, development of production systems compatible with biodiversity conservation, and incorporation of the local community and other stakeholders in management and monitoring of local and regional issues. Conservation of existing native forests and expansion of forested areas, particularly along the corridors connecting protected areas, was accomplished through several integrated, complementary activities that benefited a total of 251,000 ha. A total of 48,000 ha were directly supported through implementation of 67 pilot and demonstration sub-projects (investments in biodiversity-friendly production systems implemented by groups of farmers), and an additional 18,000 ha of registered forests under the state legal framework. Riparian forest restoration included 35,000 ha along watercourses in gallery forest. The Project also provided technical assistance to promote environmental practices within the buffer zones of conservation units, totalling an area of 150,000 ha. The state agency for agricultural extension, a key partner in the Project, provided demonstration sites for local landholders, encouraging them to adopt new conservation criteria and techniques, going beyond sustainable use of soil and water by the incorporation of biodiversity good practices.

The Project also provided the means to develop planning and regulations for private nature reserves, another way of involving the private sector in conservation, with the addition of 23,000 ha of protected areas either declared or in the process of being declared as private nature reserves. Despite the difficulties of assessing the effects of biodiversity conservation and management implemented in the Project, inherent in the slow process of forest recovery, satellite images indicate a recovery of fragment connectivity in the area—mostly in the restoration of riparian vegetation and the addition of new private conservation units. Recovery is more visible in the Atlantic Forest than in the Araucaria corridor. The main problem in the latter forest was not fragmentation but rather poverty and a high rate of deforestation.

The Project provided significant benefits and incentives in terms of capacity building to government agencies in Parana, including the development of a State biodiversity monitoring system that will contribute to the long-term conservation of biodiversity. Seventy-one indicator species were selected for baseline evaluations, 150 field monitors were trained, and there were other training, extension and education activities.

Mainstreaming of conservation into the institutional (mainly agricultural extension systems) and private rural sector is crucial to safeguard biodiversity outside traditional protected areas. This project could serve as a model for other similar initiatives.

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### Don't feed the bears!

In Finland the practice of establishing sites for the artificial feeding of brown bears, with dog pellets and farmed salmon, has the potential to have major negative effects on bear populations. This economically lucrative practice began several years ago in the Finnish Karelia, for recreational tourism. New feeding points were established in other areas of eastern Finland in spring 2009, and it is likely that more sites will be developed in the future.

Finnish bear populations play an important role in the migration of brown bears, linking the populations in Russian Karelia (believed to exceed 100,000) with those in Norway and Sweden (> 3,200 bears). The provision of food to bears in the Finland–Russia border region could cause: (1) an increase in transmission of infectious disease through direct physical contact or indirectly through animals sharing food; (2) disruption of the patterns of animal movement (through alterations to normal daily or seasonal movements as individuals converge on feeding areas) and distribution (through increases in population density in the vicinity of artificial food sources); (3) enhanced fighting and injury because of increased competition around artificial food sources; and (4) population increases exceeding the local carrying capacity. Bears conditioned to artificial feeding may also lose their natural instinct to avoid people and become aggressive towards humans while protecting the artificial feeding sites. This is most likely to occur in the case of females that repeatedly visit feeding sites with their cubs; females with cubs are among the most dangerous types of bear for people. Additionally, cubs that are reared under artificial feeding conditions may fail to learn crucial natural foraging behaviour and could starve if the artificial sources are removed.

Artificial feeding may affect wildlife populations other than the target species. Diseases have been reported to affect multiple species in communities, and competition among species for limited resources often increases as the density of animals increase in an area with food. The presence of feeding points also has the potential to cause

changes in the composition of local animal communities. One example is an increased concentration of facultative scavengers (e.g. corvids) in the immediate vicinity of feeding sites, and a consequent increase in nest predation (*Animal Conservation*, 12, 85–88).

A further issue is that the food supplements may be nutritionally unfavourable. The consumption of farmed salmon may expose bears to a variety of persistent bioaccumulative contaminants, particularly organochlorines that have been linked to cancer and abnormal mental development in humans (*Science*, 303, 226–229), and dog pellets can contain animal by-products, antibiotics and pesticides, artificial colours and chemical preservatives. Many of these have known harmful effects associated with chronic disease (e.g. dehydration, diabetes, foetal abnormalities, liver damage, obesity).

Unfortunately the provision of food to wildlife has economic drivers. Many people visit Finnish bear-feeding sites each year and the best periods for bear watching and photography are booked 1 year in advance. This has encouraged the continuation of artificial feeding despite the overwhelming evidence of its negative effects.

New feeding sites are being developed in some so-called wildlife centres and nature parks, and on private land. The conservation issues arising from the proliferation of artificial feeding sites require national legislation to limit, regulate and control the situation. Those promoting and implementing development of feeding sites must be required to guarantee food quality and control quantity. Above all, the health of Finnish bear populations must be preserved and not risked by economic imperatives. Many examples exist of humans adopting an arrogant and self-defeating attitude towards nature: this so-called techno-arrogance fails to recognize the limitations to, and ramifications of, attempts to control nature (*Conservation Biology*, 6, 350–354). Feeding dog pellets and farmed salmon to bears represents the first step towards recreational arrogance.

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## Global Tree Specialist Group News

The first meeting of the IUCN/Species Survival Commission Global Tree Specialist Group took place in Chicago, USA, on 30 June–2 July 2009, hosted by the Morton Arboretum. The main intention of the meeting was to discuss how best to update the current tree species assessments on the IUCN Red List, many of which are now out-of-date, and how best we can plan more effectively to fill in the gaps in tree species conservation information. Can we realistically propose a global tree conservation assessment? What are the immediate priorities for tree Red Listing?

This first meeting successfully reinforced the great potential for the Group to continue working together and to expand its roles both in Red Listing and in supporting the Global Trees Campaign. The positive discussions throughout the meeting stimulated a range of new ideas for working together at all levels. By providing the Group's Secretariat, Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) will look at ways to enhance communication and exchange of information between Group members.

With regard to Red Listing it was agreed that without significantly increased funding it is not feasible to undertake a comprehensive re-evaluation of tree species currently on the IUCN Red List but that the entire Group's work contributes towards a continual process of updating. Some clear priorities were identified, with a particular focus on selected genera including *Camellia*, *Diospyros* and *Ilex*. New genera for assessment can, of course, be suggested at any time and members are strongly encouraged to carry out additional assessments on smaller genera and individual taxa of interest to them.

With regard to promoting the Global Trees Campaign, suggestions from Gerry Donnelly were enthusiastically welcomed. Within the USA the potential to link the in situ work of the USDA Forest Service with the ex situ holdings of the arboretum network could lead to major gains for tree conservation.

The concept developed by Amy Hinsley, of FFI, to have a Trees to Save public awareness focus for the Global Trees Campaign was also enthusiastically supported. Working with FFI and members of the Global Tree Specialist Group, BGCI will help to facilitate the further development of both suggestions, and thus to promote the Campaign to a wider audience.

The full report of the meeting is available at <http://www.globaltrees.org>

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