

North America

Grizzly bear unsafe in British Columbia

Several environmental groups in British Columbia, Canada, have demanded a federal inquiry into the province's handling of its grizzly bear *Ursus arctos* population. The species is to be listed as Vulnerable—the lowest ranking on the endangered list—under the Endangered Species Bill to be introduced in March 1999 because the government claims that there are 10,000–13,000 grizzly bears in the province. Independent biologists say that the population is two to five times lower than government estimates, and that populations have fallen 40–88 per cent in recent decades. *Source: Taiga News*, No. 26, 2.

Alberta to lower protection of wilderness

The Alberta provincial government in Canada is considering allowing hunting in the three wilderness areas bordering the Rocky Mountain National Park and continuing to allow resource development in other protected areas. *Source: Taiga News*, No. 26, 2.

New US rhino and tiger product labelling legislation

The US Rhino and Tiger Product Labelling Act, signed into law on 30 October 1998, amends the Rhino and Tiger Conservation Act of 1994. Although the USA has prohibited imports of such products for many years, a significant number of manufactured traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) products labelled as containing rhinoceros and tiger parts continued to be available in the US. Among the principal reasons for the availability of these products in the USA is that under the US Endangered Species Act, the government bears the burden of proving that such products actually contain rhinoceros or tiger, and forensic techniques have not been able to identify tiger bone or rhinoceros horn in manufactured medicinal products. Further, the US Endangered Species Act only prohibits the import, export and interstate commerce in such products and does not specifically prohibit sale. The new legislation prohibits the import, export

and sale of any product for human consumption or application containing, or labelled or advertised to contain, any substance derived from any species of rhinoceros or tiger. It carries a penalty of up to 6 months in prison, and fines of up to \$12,000 per violation.

Source: TRAFFIC, 30 October 1998.

The redstart–mangrove connection

Studies on the American redstart *Setophaga ruticilla* have shown that the quality of a migratory bird's tropical wintering grounds can affect its survival and breeding success when it arrives in the north. The researchers measured levels of a naturally occurring stable isotope, carbon-13, in the birds' blood. Plants in certain habitats, such as wet mangrove or wet lowland forest, have less C-13 than plants typical of dry scrub. The birds that wintered in wet forest, 65 per cent of which were male, had low levels of C-13 and had maintained or gained weight, while the scrub dwellers (70 per cent of which were female) had lost up to 11 per cent of their body mass. Birds from the wet forest also reached the breeding grounds earlier. It appears that action to conserve migratory birds such as the redstart is needed not so much on the breeding grounds as in prime wet forest habitat in the tropics.

Source: Science, **282**, 1791 & 1793–1794.

Plea to ban seaweed imports

Marine scientists are pressing the US Interior Secretary to ban possession of, transport and sale of the aquarium plant *Caulerpa taxifolia*. This tropical species has already invaded Mediterranean coastal waters, choking out native life. France, Spain and Australia have already introduced bans.

Source: Science, **282**, 855.

Warbler site saved

One of the cerulean warbler's *Dendroica cerulea* most critical sites in New York—Salmon Creek in Lansing—has been saved thanks to a private landowner working with local conservationists. Between 40 and 50 pairs of this bird breed at Salmon Creek, one of 127 Important Bird Areas in the State. The migratory warbler is under pressure from loss of

winter habitat in Colombia and Peru as a result of the cultivation of coffee and other crops, as well as from habitat loss and fragmentation at breeding sites in the USA.

Source: National Audubon Society of New York, 15 December 1998.

Algal blooms follow mussel invasion

Blooms of the blue-green algae *Microcystis* spp. seem to follow an invasion of lakes in inland North America by zebra mussels *Dreissena polymorpha*, which first invaded the Great Lakes in 1980 after arriving on the hulls of ships from the Black Sea. In high numbers, the algae produce toxins that have the potential to harm wildlife as well as people. Observations of zebra mussels feeding have shown them to take up most microorganisms but to expel *Microcystis* untouched, which could result in a reduction of the populations of species that normally compete with *Microcystis* for resources. Over 75 inland lakes in Michigan alone are known to be contaminated with zebra mussels.

Source: Marine Pollution Bulletin, **36**(11), 867.

Protection for Adirondack parkland

The State of New York and Champion International have negotiated a land deal involving 583 sq km in the Adirondack Park. The land protection agreement combines fee acquisition for the major river corridors and remnant boreal forest on the Champion property with conservation easements over much of the land, thereby protecting sensitive environmental areas while continuing productive forestry.

Source: Audubon Society of New York State, 9 December 1998.

Plan for sturgeon

In an effort to restore the Atlantic sturgeon *Acipenser oxyrinchus* population in USA's Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission has banned the taking of the fish along the entire coast for the next 40 years. The catch has dropped 90 per cent over the past century.

Source: Audubon, November–December, 1998, 27.