

## Choosing the 24 most Endangered Species

Last year the SSC Steering Committee, at the suggestion of SSC consultant Dr Paul Munton, decided to list the world's ten most endangered animals and ten most endangered plants in order to draw world attention to the endangerment of species. Dr Martyn Murray, of Cambridge University, and Sara Oldfield, of the Conservation Unit at Kew, were asked to look at all the considerations, devise criteria, and come up with a list of candidates. They delved into the data stored at the Conservation Monitoring Centre (CMC) at Cambridge, into Red Data Books, IUCN reports and Specialist Group files, established their criteria (see below), and each produced a 'hit list' — 34 animals and 27 plants — for the SSC to make the selections at Madrid in November.

Faced with an *embarras de richesses* (if one can call it that), the Steering Committee decided to expand both final lists to Top Twelves, and in the case of the animal list included three not on the 'hit list': a bat, and two rhinos. The whole thing was then wrapped up in a most competent Press Kit compiled by Peter Jackson in an incredibly short time. This described all 24 species and the dangers they face together with illustrations. At the same time the CNPPA had also produced its own list of 12 most threatened protected areas, each one in a different country. Unfortunately, one area, Cape Tribulation in Australia, had to be suspended owing to disagreement in the meeting between government and NGOs over interpretation of the information, thus reducing that list to 11. This too had its own Press Kit.

The whole package was launched by the Director General of IUCN, Dr Kenton Miller, and the Chairmen of the two Commissions, Gren Lucas and Hal Eidsvik, at a press conference during the Assembly. The Spanish press made a good and immediate response, and newspapers and journals, especially in the UK, have given it considerable publicity. Peter Jackson's picture collection of the 12 chosen animals appears on pages 20 and 21.

## The Criteria

### Conservation Value

- Urgency
- Prominence
  - Attractiveness
  - Crisis appeal
  - Usefulness to mankind
  - Symbolic or figurehead appeal
- Biological Value
  - Sole representative of a higher taxonomic group (genus, family or order).
  - Conservation linked to that of other threatened species, or to an area of special

interest, or a site with (other) endemic species.

### Operational Considerations

- Need for international support
- Cost
- Likelihood of success
  - Possibility of using a variety of conservation measures.
  - Central support.
  - Local support.
  - IUCN/WWF involvement — through SSC Specialist group or major campaign.

**Socotran pomegranate *Punica protopunica***

If the four ancient and widely separated trees seen in 1967 on Socotra Island, off the Horn of Africa, all die, the species will probably become extinct. And introduced cattle and goats threaten the entire flora.

**Tarout cypress *Cupressus dupreziana***

With no trees younger than at least a century, and all the 153 known living specimens too badly mutilated for the natural growth form to be seen, this very long-lived tree of the central Sahara —

up to 2000 years — could be a valuable species for arid regions. Drought and frost resistant.

**Yeheb nut bush *Cordeauxia edulis***

The highly nutritious nuts of the yeheb, long the traditional food for the nomads of Somalia and the Ogaden, could become a staple food for low-rain regions with little or no agriculture and as a famine food. But drought, goat overgrazing and war have drastically reduced this formerly abundant bush. Experiments in its use are taking place in a number of countries.

## The Top Twelve Animals

**Bumblebee bat, Kitti's hog-nosed bat *Crasseonycteris thonglongyai*.** Only discovered by scientists in 1974, this is the world's smallest mammal, weighing under two grams. The only member of its family, it is restricted to a few limestone caves in Thailand.

**Kouprey *Bos sauveli*,** of Indo-China, mainly in Kampuchea, was considered in danger of extinction even before the war which could have wiped it out, but a small herd was reported in 1982. Discovered by science only in 1937, it may be resistant to rinderpest and so could provide valuable genetic material.

**Mediterranean monk seal *Monachus monachus*,** is now confined to remote coasts and islets and reduced to under 500, mainly in Greek and Turkish waters. Some reserves are urgent and also education of fishermen to persuade them it is not a threat to fish stocks.

**Muriqui, the woolly spider monkey *Brachyteles arachnoides*,** the largest New World monkey, survives in very small numbers, 300-400 in 8-10 widely separated patches in Brazil's devastated Atlantic forest.

**Pygmy hog *Sus salvianus*,** rediscovered in 1971, is restricted to isolated pockets of the Himalayan foothills mainly in Assam, where its grassland habitat is being destroyed and hunting for meat is a serious threat.

**Northern white rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum cottoni*,** the world's most endangered large mammal with only 10-13 surviving in Zaire's Garamba National Park, due to massive poaching for the horn.

**Sumatran rhinoceros, the woolly rhino *Didermoceros sumatrensis*,** is reduced to a few hundred survivors, mainly in Sumatra and western Malaysia. Captive breeding is planned with animals taken from areas where they are doomed.

**Kagu *Rhynchotus jubatus*.** A unique genus and family, found only on New Caledonia, this rarely seen flightless bird is harassed by introduced dogs, cats, pigs and rats, and is losing its habitat to mining and forest destruction.

**Angonoka, the Madagascan tortoise *Geochelone yniphora*** is the world's rarest tortoise, with under 200 specimens, the majority private pets. No wild nests have ever been found and captive breeding has been an almost total failure.

**Orinoco crocodile *Crocodylus intermedius*.** Wiped out in most of its former range by hide collectors, numbers of this very large crocodile — it can exceed 20ft — are believed to be under 1500.

**Queen Alexandra's birdwing butterfly *Ornithoptera alexandrae*** is the world's largest butterfly, surviving in a few fragmented jungle areas in northern Papua New Guinea. Resources are urgently needed to implement plans for a reserve there and to establish a sanctuary on an offshore island.

**Oahu or Hawaii tree snails, little agate shells *Achatinella*.** Twenty-two of 41 species are already believed extinct; the other 19 are all endangered, due to collecting, forest felling and predation by introduced ants, rodents, and, most serious of all, introduced snails, especially *Euglandia rosea*.

## The Runners Up

The following species were on the original lists but not selected for the two Top Twelve lists:

### MAMMALS

**Greater bilby**, or rabbit-eared bandicoot *Macrotis lagotis* — Australia's largest bandicoot and very rare.

**Maned sloth** *Bradypus torquatus* — disappearing with the destruction of Brazil's coastal forests.

**Golden-rumped lion tamarin** *Leontopithecus chrysopygus* — under 100 survive in two Brazilian reserves.

**Jentink's dulker** *Cephalophus jentinki* — rare and decreasing due to loss of forest

**Javan rhinoceros** *Rhinoceros sondaicus* — about 50 remain in one reserve.

**Golden lion tamarin** *Leontopithecus rosalia* — under 100 survive in threatened east Brazil forest.

### BIRDS

**Madagascar serpent eagle** *Eutriorchis astur* — not seen since 1930.

**Madagascar sea eagle** *Haliaeetus vociferoides* — not more than 10 pairs survive.

**Cuban ivory-billed woodpecker** *Campephilus principalis bairdii* — up to 8 pairs may survive.

**Amsterdam Island albatross** *Diomedea amsterdamensis* — recently discovered — only 30 birds with 5/6 pairs nesting.

**Bengal florican** *Houbaropsis bengalensis* — a bustard down to under 500 and decreasing due to loss of grasslands.

**Lesser florican** *Sypheotides indica* — very rare and probably still declining.

**Mauritius parakeet** *Psittacula echo* — down to 5-8 birds, mainly males, partly due to hurricanes.

**Mauritius pink pigeon** *Nesoenas mayeri* —

numbers roughly stable at 10-24 birds; captive breeding the best hope.

**Imperial parrot or sisserou** *Amazona imperialis* — a bird of mountain rainforest in West Indies; very low numbers and illegally hunted.

**Tomba bowerbird** *Archboldia sandfordi* — Papua New Guinea's rarest bird.

### REPTILES

**Dahl's toad-headed turtle** *Phrynops dahlia* — extremely rare in a very small area of Bolivia due to habitat loss.

**Chinese alligator** *Alligator sinensis* — may soon be extinct due to killing and loss of habitat.

### FISHES

**Shortnose sturgeon** *Acipenser brevirostrum* — threatened by river pollution and overfishing in rivers of western North Atlantic.

### INVERTEBRATES

**Dusky large blue butterfly** *Maculinea nausithous* — reserves, surveys and research are urgently needed for this butterfly of wetlands in northern Spain and central Europe.

**Homerus swallowtail butterfly** *Papilio homerus* — confined to two mountain areas, each only a few square kilometres, in Jamaica.

**Relict Himalayan dragonfly** *Epiophlebia laidlawi* — limited to the eastern Himalayas, in steep valleys at 200-3000m with clear rapid streams.

**Lord Howe Island stick-insect** *Dryococelus australis* — an endemic of this island group, exterminated on Lord Howe by black rats but rediscovered on neighbouring Ball's Pyramid.

**St Helena earwig** *Labidura herculeana* — the world's largest, up to 78mm long, wingless; not seen since 1965.