

# First Quarter in a Nutshell

**March 27** - Cambodia's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries opened the **Second Annual Workshop on Strengthening Forest Crime Monitoring and Reporting**, which will help efforts to protect forests in the country. Organised in coordination with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the meeting aimed to review and assess the process of forest crime monitoring and reporting in the past, and outline follow-up actions to eradicate forest anarchy. Forest resources are limited to 10.6 million hectares and provide the livelihood for 85% of the Cambodian population.

**March 26** - The **European Commission** advised **Member States not to accept export permits for specimens of *Swietenia macrophylla* [mahogany] from Brazil** without first obtaining from the government a statement that those specimens were legally acquired. This effectively boosts efforts against the illegal logging and trade of the species. Big-leafed mahogany, also known as American mahogany, is one of the hardest neotropical woods, and among the most valuable on the international market. Worldwide consumer demand for quality mahogany furniture drives the trade. Wholesale stripping of Amazon forests has resulted in an estimated 70% depletion of the world's supply.



**Mahogany logs in the Brazilian Amazon**

Photo courtesy TRAFFIC

**March 25** - The National Parks Conservation Association announced today its annual list of **America's Ten Most Endangered National Parks**, highlighting threats that include air pollution, development and insufficient funding. The parks are:

- Big Bend National Park, Texas
- Everglades National Park/Big Cypress National Preserve, Florida
- Federal Hall National Memorial, New York
- Glacier National Park, Montana
- Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, Alaska
- Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee and North Carolina
- Mojave National Preserve, California



Photo courtesy of National Park Service

**Mojave National Preserve**

- Ocmulgee National Monument, Georgia
- Valley Forge National Historical Park, Pennsylvania
- Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming and Montana

The NPCA report is available at: <http://www.npca.org/>

**March 25** - A portion of **Peru's debt to the United States will be cancelled** in return for the Peruvian government's commitment to conserve and maintain wildlife reserves and other protected forest areas. The agreement states that Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and the World Wide Fund for Nature will contribute \$1.1 million, and



Photo courtesy Parks Watch Peru

**Huancabamba Canyon, Peru**

the US will provide \$5.5 million to cancel a portion of the debt. In return, Peru will provide \$10.6 million to conservation activities of NGOs for the next 12 years. Peru is home to 84 of the 103 types of "life zones" found on Earth, and ranks as one of the world's top "mega-biodiverse" countries.

**March 22** - **UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme added two new natural wetland areas** on the borders of Poland and Ukraine to its World Network of Biosphere Reserves. Poland and Ukraine aim to merge the two sites into a single biosphere reserve, which would become the sixth trans-border biosphere reserve worldwide. The rivers, lakes, moors and forest of the two sites are a haven for birds as well as home to people of three nationalities who practise a variety of different cultures and religions. There are now 409 MAB reserves on Earth.

**March 21** - The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has persuaded **the government of Tanzania to safeguard a unique area located on Tanzania's Southern Highlands**, which is known for its diversity of orchids. It will be the first area in tropical Africa protected primarily for its flora. Known as the "Garden of God", the remote grassland is covered six months of the year in wildflowers and orchids, and

is inhabited by unique chameleons, frogs, one of the world's rarest butterflies, and 12 globally significant bird species, including breeding colonies of blue swallows, mountain marsh widowbirds, and Denholm's bustards. Up to 85 orchid species are used in chikanda or kinaka, a delicacy in which the root of terrestrial orchids is the key ingredient in a type of meatless sausage.

**March 19** - A workshop on the **"Potential of Organic Farming for Biodiversity"** in Warsaw, Poland sought to determine how modern agriculture could enhance production without reducing biodiversity. The workshop brought together over 80 participants from NGOs, government agencies, scientific organisations and farming communities worldwide. The discussions highlighted new methods for improving farming while conserving biodiversity. The workshop was organised by IUCN-The World Conservation Union, the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, and the International Federation on Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM).

**March 12** - The Prime Minister of **Jordan** has ratified a decree approving the **signing of the Kyoto Protocol**.

**March 7** - The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) has joined forces with other conservation organisations to form a **Global Mammal Assessment and Partnership**. The project will review the status of all species of mammals, focusing on mapping geographic distributions, assessing the degree of threat, and recording essential habitats. The data will be analysed to determine the extent to which they can be used to support a new generation of biodiversity assessments. It will also include a compari-

son of conservation needs, trends and priorities between mammals, birds (using BirdLife International's Important Bird Areas and Endemic Bird Areas), and amphibians (using the Global Amphibian Assessment being implemented by IUCN/SSC, Conservation International's Center for Applied Biodiversity Science CI-CABS, and NatureServe). The GMA also contributes to an initiative involving several conservation organisations (CI-CABS, IUCN/SSC, NatureServe, BirdLife and WWF) to map the distributions of all terrestrial vertebrate species (mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians) by 2004.

**March 6** - Over the past four years, **Lebanon**, with support from the United Nations Development Program/Global Environment Facility, **has been working to sustain its national parks and protect endangered cedar forests**. A clear reflection of Lebanon's hard work is the Al Shouf Cedar Reserve, which is managed by local NGOs under the Ministry of the Environment. It covers about 5% of the country's territory and protects cedar trees as well as 27 species of wild mammals, 12 of which are on the IUCN Red List. With the technical support of IUCN, Lebanon's protected areas aim to link conservation with national reconciliation and rebuilding after a period of conflict. The latest achievement for Al Shouf is the completion of the visitors' centre through a grant from the Japanese government.

**March 1** - **Australia and Vietnam plan to implement a one-year nature conservation project in the Lower Mekong Region** to improve natural resources within protected areas and review the relationship between the natural environment and socio-economic development in the region. A field study in Thua Thien-Hue Province will examine the relationship between economic planning

and protected areas at a local level. The project is financed by Vietnam's Forest Protection Department (FPD), the Australian Agency for International Development, and the governments of Denmark and Switzerland. Other researches will focus on the role of protected areas in flood protection; the establishment of the Tam Giang Lagoon as a protected area to improve fishery production; the sustainable use of non-timber forest products in Phong Dien Nature Reserve; the role of forests in Bach Ma National Park for irrigation activities; and the park's potential for increased ecotourism.

**February 26** - **Brazil recently set out to map the huge untapped potential of its medicinal plant species**. Brazil's environmental agency said it has created the country's first-ever database and research centre on medicinal plants and has catalogued 300 medicinal plant species, which represents less than 10% of the country's natural medicine cabinet. Brazil hopes to uncover and document more herbal remedies to protect valuable plant species from bio-pirates who frequently coerce poor Amazon tribes into extracting plant remedies for export. Efforts to protect plant species include development projects for far-flung communities to provide them with alternative income. Some 2,000 workers have been recruited to form networks that will work with police to stop plant and animal trafficking. The activities coincide with a bid by Brazil to guarantee intellectual property rights for its indigenous populations for many herbal remedies, passed down through generations. Brazil declared its commitment to that goal at the United Nations' World Intellectual Property Organization in December 2001.

**February 22** - The South African National Parks and the Peace Parks Foundation

launched **My Acre of Africa**, a programme that offers people the opportunity to sponsor an acre of South Africa's Kruger National Park by buying a brick to be placed on a living map in the park. Kruger National Park measures 4,692,914 acres, corresponding to the number of bricks that are available for sponsorship. If fully subscribed the programme could raise US\$200 million for conservation projects. The 3D map will replicate the park in miniature and incorporate specialized education resources. The Park is home to 130 species of mammals including lions, elephants, leopards, buffalo and rhino. There are 114 species of reptiles, 468 species of birds, and 300 varieties of trees. Funds raised will go towards the recovery of degraded ecosystems, land acquisition to extend protected areas, and towards development of a conservation education programme.

For more information, visit the Peace Parks Foundation at: <http://www.peaceparks.org/> and the South African National Parks at: <http://www.parks-sa.co.za/>

**February 20** - A study by scientists from the Center for Applied Biodiversity Science (CABS) at Conser-



Image courtesy My Acre of Africa

**Concept of the living map laid out in bricks**

vation International (CI) and the University of Virginia states that the **greatest concentration of all primate and carnivore evolutionary history exists within those species found in just 25 biodiversity hotspots**. About 55% of the world's primates and 22% of



Photo by Tito Nadur

**Delacour's langur is struggling to survive in Vietnam, part of the Indo-Burma Hotspot**

carnivores are found only within biodiversity hotspots - and yet they represent 70% of the evolutionary history for the entire species. These species represent genetic lineages that are vital to their future diversity, evolution and survival. As species disappear, the genetic base for the future evolution of new primates and carnivores also begins to shrink.

The hotspots are 25 highly threatened areas that together contain more than 60% of the world's terrestrial plant and animal species - within just 1.4% of the planet's land surface. CI recently announced a global initiative to stop species extinctions in biodiversity hotspots and to protect large areas of major tropical wilderness areas. Claims to secure \$1.5 billion in private investments over the next 10 years, and obtain another \$4.5 billion from the public sector. The initiative will create global alliances, bolster scientific field research and offer new economic options to protect biodiversity. More information is available at: <http://www.biodiversityscience.org/>

**February 19** - The drinking water supply for **Kathmandu Valley's** one million inhabitants has been secured by the **designation of Shivapuri National Park** that protects the watershed which meets more than a quarter of the valley's water demand. The park is located 2,700 meters above sea level and covers an area of about 144 square kilometres. It is inhabited by 177 different species of birds, langur



Photo courtesy of Himalayan Experience

**Langur monkey in Shivapuri National Park**

monkeys, Himalayan black bears, boar, deer and leopards. The Shivapuri area was established as Watershed and Wildlife Reserve in 1983.

Starting with the establishment of Shivapuri National Park, the government intends to surround the Kathmandu Valley with a chain of linked conservation areas. Two protected natural forests, Fulchoki Forest and Chandragiri will soon be declared as conservation areas. Fulchoki Forest is home to more than 571 flowering plants, 300 species of butterflies, and 254 species of birds - nearly a third of all the 820 bird species found in Nepal. Spotted leopards and deer roam this area, located on the highest hill along the Kathmandu Valley rim.

**February 15** – Speakers at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) agreed that **Information technology is spurring a revolution in biodiversity research** and has become a vital tool in understanding global biodiversity issues that are crucial for sustainability. Some technologies being used include 3D electronic images of species that are accelerating identification of poorly known groups of animals; distributed or interconnected databases that enable scientists to query data stored in multiple databases across the world; and Geographic Information Systems, which are used to map and analyze multiple characteristics of landscapes. A number of projects that combined information technology with biodiversity conservation were presented at the meeting, including the

Global Litter Invertebrate Decomposition Experiment (GLIDE); the latest applications of genetic technology and genomics for conserving biodiversity in native habitats; AmphibiaWeb, a web based system that collates data on amphibians from around the world; an international study of invasive species; the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment; and Amazonia GIS, another new collaborative research programme that seeks to help conservation efforts by improving access to data across international borders and disciplines.

**February 18** - China, Brazil, India, and nine other of the world's most biodiverse countries signed an **alliance to fight biopiracy** and press for rules protecting their people's rights to genetic resources found on their land. The declaration echoed complaints that wealthy nations are "prospecting" for species in order to patent or sell them without offering concessions or benefits for local people. Formally known as the Group of Allied Mega-Biodiverse Nations, the 12 nations in alliance that contain 70% of the world's biodiversity said they would press for more equal trade rules on patenting and registering products based on plant and animal resources. The alliance, which includes Indonesia, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, Kenya, Peru, Venezuela, and South Africa, pledged to press its cause at this summer's U.N. World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September.

**February 15** – In the framework of the Regional Study on Forest Policy and Institutional Reforms (RETA 5900), the **Asian Development Bank** organised a two-day regional workshop with the objective of presenting the results of the ADB forestry portfolio analysis and have these

validated by multisector stakeholders; obtain insights on the perspective of selected communities on the effectiveness and impact of past ADB forestry activities; identify forest sector policy, legal and institutional constraints in Asia; identify macro forest resource demand and supply trends and technological challenges in Asia, present and discuss the future ADB forest sector strategy; and solicit multi-stakeholder inputs on how to plan and implement future ADB forest sector initiatives/investments. The objective of the RETA is to **revise the ADB forest policy and sector strategy** to make it consistent with and reflective of the needs of developing member countries (DMCs), recent thinking and development in the sector, and align the policy with ADB's overarching goal of poverty reduction. Interested parties can follow up the process through the ADB web site at: <http://www.adb.org/projects/forestpolicy/>

**February 14-15** – In line with its networking mandate, the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation (ARCBC) attended the **Regional Workshop on ADB Forest Policy and Strategy** organized by the ADB in Manila, Philippines and distributed informative materials including the series **"Essentials of Protected Area Management in the Philippines"** and other documents relevant to biodiversity conservation in the region. Documents are distributed free of charge thanks to the support of the European Commission and can be obtained via the ARCBC web site [www.arcbc.org.ph](http://www.arcbc.org.ph).

**February 14** - A study by UNEP-WCMC and the Center for Applied Biodiversity Science (CABS) at Conservation International identified the world's top 10 coral reef hotspots, which are rich in marine species found only in small areas, and therefore highly vulnerable to extinction. The

list is based on new research that compares the range and endemism of certain key species with known threats to coral reefs from human impacts. The 10 coral reef hotspots, ranked according to the degree of threat, are: 1) Philippines; 2) Gulf of Guinea Islands; 3) Sunda Islands (Indonesia); 4) Southern Mascarene Islands (near Madagascar); 5) Eastern South Africa; 6) Northern Indian Ocean; 7) Southern Japan, Taiwan and southern China; 8) Cape Verde Islands; 9) Western Caribbean; 10) Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. These areas contain just 24% of the world's coral reefs, or 0.017% of the oceans, but claim 34% of restricted-range species. Agriculture, deforestation and development resulting in large quantities of sediment,



Photo courtesy of Scubaventure

**Corals and reef fish at Coron Island, Busuanga, Philippines**

nutrients and other pollutants going into coastal waters, as well as intense fishing and climate change are listed as the leading causes of reef ecosystem destruction. A quarter of the world's coral reefs has already been destroyed or severely degraded through global warming. Reef degradation in the hotspots could deprive some of the world's poorest people of an important source of nutrition, and in many cases their livelihoods. Creation of more marine reserves that are off limits to fishing is the first step in protecting these hotspots.

**February 13** – The United Nations Environment Programme launched **"Dugong: Status Report and Action Plans for Countries and Territories"**, the first global study of the enigmatic "sea cow". The publication presents a global



overview of the status of the dugong and its management in the countries that make up its range. The report will hopefully help individual nations develop their own conservation plans for the species. The dugong, the only herbivorous mammal that is strictly marine, is long-lived and reproduces slowly. It feeds on seagrasses of coastal habitats, which are often under pressure from human activities. Dugongs are also impacted by pollution, disease, hunting, and incidental drowning in fishing nets. The species is listed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The publication is available at <http://www.unep.org/dewa/reports/dugongreport.asp>

**February 5** - The World Wide Fund for Nature called for **the protection of the Tessa Nilo**, an Indonesian tropical forest with the largest variety of lowland forest plants known to science, which could be destroyed within four years if the current rate of logging continues. A survey on the 1,800 km<sup>2</sup> forest revealed 218 varieties of fernlike plants in a single 200-square-meter area. The area is also home to a wide range of wildlife, including elephant, tiger, gibbon, and tapir. Tessa Nilo is heavily logged for timber and pulp by both small-scale illegal loggers and international corporations, with devastating effects on both plant and animal life.

**February 5** - "**Warnings from the Bush**", a report by Climate Action Network Australia stated that three of Australia's World Heritage Areas - Kakadu National Park, the Wet Tropics of Queensland, and the Great Barrier Reef - are showing

signs of significant damage due to climate change. Another World Heritage Area, the Blue Mountains, will also be affected while Mt. Kosciuszko, Australia's highest mountain, will lose its alpine environment due to global warming. At least 90 Australian animals have been specifically identified as being at risk from climate warming, including the koala, Leadbeater's possum, and the hairy-nosed wombat.

**January 29** - The United Nations University announced that environmental damage to mountain ranges



Photo courtesy Mari Kymäläinen

**The koala, the state animal of Queensland, Australia.**

due to pollution, war, deforestation, mining and uncontrolled tourism could trigger more floods, landslides and fires, and bring famine to people living on their slopes. **The most threatened mountain ranges in the world** include the European Alps; Himalaya-Karakorum-Hindu Kush chain; Rockies of western North America; Great Smokey Mountains in the United States; Amber Mountains in Madagascar; Snowy Mountains of Australia; Western Carpathians/Tatra Mountains in the Slovak Republic and Poland; Sierra Chincua in Mexico; Pamir mountains in Tajikistan and Hengduan mountains in southwest China. Researchers stressed the need for more data to design an effective policy to protect mountains, which is also affected by a serious problem of widespread over-simplification of mountain-related issues.

**January 28** - The World Wide Fund for Nature called

for better management of mountain wetlands, which could play a major role in preventing the world's freshwater crisis. Mountain wetlands are important not only in their headwaters or source but for entire river basins. They are important for recharging groundwater that ensures a supply that fills wells, runs in taps, or can be collected from streams for a number of basic daily uses. In addition to the problems caused by unsustainable use, land conversion, grazing and deforestation, mountain wetlands worldwide are increasingly pressured by mining and tourism.

**January 25** - The World Wide Fund for Nature reported that **heavy snowfalls in the Primorskii Region of Russia are likely to cause the death of ungulates** such as Sika deer, Roe deer and wild boars due to starvation. This in turn threatens the survival of their predators, the Far Eastern leopard and the Amur tiger, which are critically endangered. The WWF had been offering to develop an Ungulates Recovery Programme as the basis for long-term conservation of the Amur tiger and Far Eastern leopard, but unfortunately this is still not in place. Emergency measures to save the ungulates include clearing roads, cutting low hanging tree branches for grazing, and bringing in additional forage. The WWF estimates



Photo courtesy of WWF/Klein & Hubbert

**Siberian tiger**

\$40,000 dollars will be needed to support these emergency measures to preserve the remaining tigers and leopards.

**January 24** - A **project linking conservation and tourism at six World Heritage Sites** managed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and RARE Center for Tropical Conservation **got a major boost with additional funding amounting to \$1 million** from Aveda, a global cosmetics company, and the United Nations Foundation. The funding will benefit the Sian Ka'an and El Vizcaino biosphere reserves in Mexico, Tikal National Park in Guatemala, the Rio Platano biosphere reserve in Honduras, and the Komodo and Ujung Kulon National Parks in Indonesia. It is hoped that the project, which uses tourism to help mitigate threats to biodiversity conservation, will become a blue print for initiatives elsewhere where the demands of tourists can be balanced with the needs and cultural traditions of local people, the landscape and environment.

**January 22** - The World Bank approved the implementation of a \$6.9 million **project to conserve 25,000 hectares of wetlands in the Azov-Black Sea coastal ecological corridor** that supports millions of migratory waterbirds. There are two major Black Sea migratory waterbird flyways: an east-west flyway that spans the northwestern shelf of the Black Sea, and is used by waterbirds enroute to wintering habitats in the western Black Sea, along the Adriatic Sea, and Africa; and a north-south flyway that crosses the Crimean peninsula and the Black Sea to Africa. The marshes, lagoons, and mudflats in the eastern part of the project region, where these two flyways intersect, are a

critical link in both flyways. These wetlands are also critical to species that migrate in a dispersed pattern rather than along defined flyways such as the curlew sandpiper, which rely on these wetlands in their migrations between Scandinavia and the Arabian Peninsula and East Africa. Project activities are aimed at reducing soil and nutrient runoff from farms, and building the capacity of NGOs, local communities and government agencies to improve environmental protection programmes.

**January 21** - The Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands announced that Ecuador has designated **two new Wetlands of International Importance**. These are the 46-hectare "Refugio de Vida Silvestre Isla Santa Clara" and the 113-hectare "Laguna de Cube" in the Provincia de Esmeraldas. Isla Santa Clara forms a complex transitional marine/coastal system in an area where marine currents and the fresh water merge at the Gulf of Guayaquil. The island is an undeveloped area of importance for the conservation of waterbirds and constitutes a major refuge for the marine biodiversity of the continental coast of Ecuador. It was inscribed as a Protected Area of Natural Heritage in 1999. "Laguna de Cube" is a lake at the southeastern edge of the Mache-Chindul mountains. It is the country's only inland wetland in the coastal mountains, at 350 meters altitude, and supports some 23 mammal, 40 bird, and 11 reptile species.



**Pelicans like this one inhabit Isla Santa Clara**

Photos courtesy Ecotourism Ecuador



**Reserva Ecologica Mache Chindul, Esmeraldas**

**January 18** - **Indigenous fish are rapidly disappearing in Japan** as the population of stronger species from the United States continues to spread. Black bass (introduced in 1925) and the Blue gill (first reported when the mayor of Chicago presented some to then Crown Prince Emperor Akihito in 1960) are practically all over the country, according to a survey by the National Federation of Inland Water Fisheries Cooperatives in 2001. Largemouth black bass can grow to 32 inches long and weigh 10 kilograms. Blue gills are smaller, measuring up to 9 inches and weighing less than 250 grams. Among their victims are the Southern Top-mouthed Minnow, Deep Crucian carp, and the Northern and Flat bitterling. Environment officials want to eradicate the species, despite strong protests from millions of sports fishermen. Scientists advocate a more intensive biodiversity study to determine how the species can be controlled.

**January 17** - The Kenya Wildlife Service shocked conservationists when it announced that it was relying on government handouts to operate and that **elephant poaching had resumed in Kenya**. Environmentalists fear renewed poaching could lead to another decimation of elephants despite a global ban on elephant ivory trade. The Kenya Wildlife Service has only 1,000 rangers and needs 2,500 more to staff the forest populations of Mt. Kenya, Aberdares, Shimba Hills and Mt. Elgon plus the Maasai Mara, Amboseli,

Tsavo and Marsabit parks. The country is currently experiencing a budget deficit after the International Monetary Fund and World Bank refused to advance the country any further cash until it shows willingness to fight corruption. Evidence of renewed elephant poaching emerged after the seizure of 1,255 tusks from two homes in neighboring Tanzania.

**January 17** - **China hosted the first meeting of environment ministers of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** in Beijing in preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. Discussions covered climate change and the entry into force of the Kyoto climate protocol, energy generation, protection of biodiversity, and preventing the spread of desert areas. ASEM is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation bringing together the 15 countries of the European Union, and 10 Asian nations: Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam. The ASEM Summit is held every second year and brings together the Heads of State and Governments of the 25 ASEM countries, plus the President of the European Commission. The next ASEM meeting will take place in Copenhagen, Denmark later this year.

**January 14** - **Ten Siamese crocodiles (Crocodylus siamensis) have been released in the Bau Sau wetlands in Cat Tien National Park, Vietnam**, which is known to have harboured large numbers of these crocodiles in the past although none has been observed over the last 7 years. The crocodiles are part of a larger number donated by Hoa Ca crocodile farm in Ho Chi Minh City. All animals have been DNA tested at Queensland University - Australia to assure that they

are of pure *C. siamensis* breed. About 25 more crocodiles remain at the headquarters of Cat Tien National Park, most of which have yet to be DNA tested. These will be released over an estimated period of 3 years, with the assistance of the IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group. Post release activities include the regular monitoring of the crocodiles to see whether they remain or will disperse over a larger area. The Park's Forest Protection Department will step up its law enforcement operations in the area to deter potential violators. Plans are being prepared to distribute information on the biological importance of the crocodiles, targeting people who live in the vicinity of the wetlands.

**January 10** - The Worldwatch Institute released **State of the World 2002**, the 19<sup>th</sup> edition of an annual report on the health of the planet and its people. The report discusses issues central to the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development and states that despite a number of social and environmental advances since the 1992 Earth Summit, health and environmental problems have piled up: global carbon dioxide emissions climbed more than nine percent; and 27% of the world's coral reefs are now severely damaged. Factors that have impeded the progress towards building a sustainable world include the low priority given to environmental policies, decreased foreign aid and increased Third world indebtedness. The report adds that increased financial and political support for international social and environmental programmes is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success in the transition to a sustainable world, and stresses the significance of the active involvement of other powerful international actors, such as NGOs and the business community. For more on State of the World

2002, visit: <http://www.worldwatch.org>.

**January 10** - The Lowland Tapir Project, which works to conserve the endangered tapir, announced that **oil from an abandoned exploratory oil well in the Ecuadorian Amazon is spilling uncontrolled** into the environment months after government authorities were first notified. The spill was discovered in October 2001, when hunters came upon a huge pool of crude oil surrounded by dead tapirs and other wildlife. The event was reported to the oil company, Petroecuador, but was not investigated. Today the oil spill continues to kill wildlife and pollute nearby streams. Tapirs are plant eaters and the largest native mammals on the South American continent. They are in danger of disappearing because of hunting and clearcutting of their forest habitat.



Photo courtesy of Lowland Tapir Project

**Lowland tapir**

**January 10** - Researchers aided by World Wildlife Fund and the Wildlife Conservation Society **photographed rare species for the first time in Cambodia** using automatic infrared cameras triggered by the passage of wildlife. In the Kirirom National Park, surveyors sighted the elusive Spotted linsang, a slender cat-like carnivore. It was the first time this species had been recorded in Cambodia. Tigers, clouded leopards, marbled cats, sun bears, Asian elephants, Asian wild dogs, and gaur and banteng, two species of wild cattle were among the species



Photo courtesy of WWF

**Golden cat captured by a camera trap in Cambodia**

caught in the camera traps. The surveys revealed more than 60 species of large mammals, including eight primates and six cats. The effort is described as an important first step toward identifying measures that have the greatest chance of conserving critically endangered wildlife species in Cambodia. Many of the species caught on camera now live outside national parks in forest areas that have been set aside for logging, thus illustrating the need to strengthen Cambodia's system of protected areas.

**January 9** - The **Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Secretariat welcomed two new Parties** to the CMS: **Gambia's** ratification entered into force on 1 August 2001 while **Sao Tome and Principe's** ratification, on 1 December 2001. To date the membership of CMS has grown to 79 Parties.

**January 7** - North America is facing a "widespread crisis" due to its shrinking biodiversity, according to **"The North American Mosaic: A State of the Environment Report"** released by the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). The report states that in the process of finding solutions to transportation, settlement, energy and other material needs, remaining natural environments have been placed under enormous stress, and continue to be fragmented, polluted or damaged in other ways. The decline in habitat, plus specific hunting and harvesting practices, has led

to a widespread crisis not confined to any one country or region. Half of North America's most biodiverse eco-regions are severely degraded and the region now has at least 235 threatened species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. Because biodiversity loss is irreversible, the potential impact on the human condition, on the fabric of the continent's living systems, and on the process of evolution will be immense. The North American Mosaic presents the first analysis of the overall state of the North American environment by the Montreal-based CEC. The CEC was established to build cooperation among the NAFTA partners—Canada, Mexico and the United States—in protecting shared environments, with a particular focus on the opportunities and challenges presented by continent-wide free trade. For more information, visit <http://www.cec.org/soe>.

**January 3** - Researchers from the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Institute in Frankfurt, Germany revealed that the **carnivorous pitcher plant (*Nepenthes albobmarginata*) actively chooses its prey**. The plant grows in the shape of a pitcher and feeds on insects that fall inside and are digested by the plant's chemicals. The researchers reported that carnivorous pitcher plants of the genus *Nepenthes* are not usually selective about their prey, but *Nepenthes albobmarginata* was an exception. 'Usually, the pitcher plants had a poor catch — a few beetles, ants, or flies. But when termites were around, researchers found thousands of them in a single plant. All termites in one pitcher belonged to the same species and were in the same state of decomposition, suggesting that they were caught over a short period. They noticed the pitchers had little white hairs — except the ones that were filled with termites. To investigate this

fresh intact pitchers, together with pitchers with their white rims removed, these were placed near the head of a foraging column of termites. When termites came into direct contact with the white rim hairs, they turned back to the column and recruited their nestmates, which began grazing on the rim. They then fell en masse, thus providing a feast for the plant. As many as 22 termites a minute fell to their slow deaths, and it seemed the plants stopped growing the hairs once they had their fill of termites. They said that was the first example of a carnivorous plant actually choosing its prey and using its own tissue as bait.

**January 2** - The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the UNEPNet Freshwater Portal** in response to the increasing concern regarding the quality of the world's drinking water resources. The website was created to help environmental assessment professionals and policy makers keep up to date with an extensive catalogue of information resources, ranging from documents and databases to maps and graphics. The site covers critical freshwater issues, including water scarcity, irrigated agriculture, water and sanitation, water quality, groundwater, transboundary water management, water and ecosystems, floods and droughts, and urban water. About one-third of the world's population lives in countries with moderate to high water stress. Problems are currently most acute in Africa and West Asia, but lack of water is already a major constraint to industrial and socio-economic growth in many other areas, including China, India and Indonesia. If present consumption patterns continue, two out of every three persons on Earth will live in water-stressed conditions by the year 2025. ■