

## Second quarter in a nutshell

**June 26** – A rare green turtle, about 60 cm wide and weighing more than 70 kg, **reappeared after 40 years and laid eggs on Koh Samui in Thailand.** Guards would be deployed a week before hatching in August to prevent more theft. Killing sea turtles and taking away their eggs is illegal in Thailand, punishable by up to four years in jail and/or a fine of 40,000 baht. Green turtles have all but gone from Koh Samui but are often seen laying eggs in Malaysia and Indonesia.

**June 26** – The Philippines' Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary Heherson T. Alvarez asked University of the Philippines (UP) President Francisco Nemenzo to help **save the UP Arboretum, one of the last remaining forests within Metro Manila.** Located in Quezon City, the Arboretum is home to trees, shrubs and herbaraceous plants that are cultivated for scientific and educational purposes. It is currently threatened by the operation of an open garbage dumpsite, as well as encroachment by a growing local community.

**June 17** – Threatened by global warming, depleting biodiversity and rising fears of natural disasters, **Bangladesh recently launched a drive to put at least 20% of the country under forests.** The 20% forest cover is needed by 2015 to offset the impact of global warming and shield the country from frequent storms coming from the Bay of Bengal. Forests now cover only 9% of the country's land. Sundarban, the country's biggest mangrove forest and a World Heritage Site, is facing decay as thousands of trees suffered a "top dying" disease without remedy. The Sundarban is home to Royal Bengal tigers and hundreds of other wildlife species and provides Bangladesh and

neighbouring West Bengal state of India a strong shield against sea storms.

**June 11** – Environment ministers from **Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam signed a pact to help each other tackle the land and forest fires** that have periodically blighted the region's agriculture and tourist industries with choking clouds of smoke. Smoke and haze caused by massive forest fires in 1997 and 1998 cost regional economies US\$9 billion, mainly in agriculture, transport, and tourism. Each country will cooperate in developing and implementing measures to prevent fires and provide early warning systems. Under the agreement, ASEAN countries would allow fire-fighting and search-and-rescue personnel and equipment to transit through their territories. This is the first regional arrangement in the world to collectively tackle land and forest fires and its resultant transboundary haze pollution.

**June 7** – The Philippines joined Brazil, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Peru, South Africa, and Venezuela in the **Group of Like-Minded Megadiversity Countries for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biological Diversity** during the 4th Preparatory Committee Meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Bali, Indonesia. The group represents almost 70% of the planet's biological diversity and around 45% of the world's population. Membership in the group will allow partners to promote and conserve their country's rich biodiversity through the development of joint projects in making inventories of its resources, investment in the use of endogenous technologies that support the conservation of genetic

materials and sustainable economic development at the local level, and provision of funding for cooperation projects with the world community.

**June 6** – **Australia and the Republic of Korea announced plans to work together to protect birds that migrate between the two countries.** The East Asian-Australasian Flyway extends from the Arctic through Asia to Australia and New Zealand. Birds fly through this route twice a year from north to south and back, travelling up to 25,000 km per year. Millions of wading birds, like the Eastern Curlew make this journey, stopping at wetlands in Korea and Australia along the way. Australia already has bilateral migratory bird protection agreements with Japan and the Peoples' Republic of China.

**June 5** – The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) celebrated the signing of the **Tri-national Wetlands Initiative**, a historic international wetlands conservation agreement between Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. The Initiative is a commitment to work together to achieve sustainable management of 3 million ha of tropical wetlands identified as global priorities for conservation and contained within existing protected areas - Kakadu National Park (Australia), Wasur National Park (Indonesia) and Tonda Wildlife Management Area (Papua New Guinea). The agreement will greatly improve the management of these parks, and encourage the creation of other protected areas. Conservation benefits include cooperative action on common threats and the protection of numerous endangered species and millions of migratory waders and waterfowl. WWF's Living Waters Campaign has recognized this major contribution to wetland conservation as a "Gift to the Earth".

**June 5** – Several of the world's foremost ocean agencies, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), have created an **Internet-based Oceans Atlas** ([www.oceanatlas.org](http://www.oceanatlas.org)) to help reverse the decline and promote the sustainable development of oceans. The Atlas provides users with continuously updated data on the state of the world's oceans, maps, development trends and threats to human health from the deteriorating marine environment. It is designed to be an encyclopaedic resource and the world's foremost information clearinghouse and online forum for experts in ocean issues. To reach broader audiences, a CD-ROM and other media will supplement the website.

**June 3-15** – **European Union ministers and ambassadors ratified the Kyoto climate treaty** at a United Nations ceremony, handing in papers from their respective nations. The ratification means that national legislatures had approved the pact, aimed at cutting polluting emissions of greenhouse gases, blamed for rising global temperatures. Participants included Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Belgium, Britain, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal. Margot Wallstrom, the European Commissioner for the Environment, represented the European Commission.

**May 27** – The IUCN/SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group met to draw up an **action plan for elephant conservation** in all of the 13 range states, following continued pressure from deforestation, hunting and major changes in land use. The conference will focus on major issues facing the Asian elephant in the wild, including their virtual extinction in Vietnam, widespread land conversion on the Indonesian island of Sumatra and also

the potential for conservation efforts in the largely un-studied forests of Myanmar.

**May 23** – The “**Greening the World Summit on Sustainable Development**” initiative was launched in Johannesburg, South Africa to ensure that the World Summit is hosted in a way that demonstrates environmental best practice while countering the impact of 60,000 expected delegates. By taking steps to reduce waste and encourage the efficient use of water and energy, the initiative will ease the burden of the WSSD on the environment. It will also leave a legacy of projects that will bring about improvements in the quality of the environment in poor and rural communities over the long term. More information can be obtained from [www.greeningthewssd.com](http://www.greeningthewssd.com).



**May 20** – Over 1,100 delegates from 130 countries attended the **World Ecotourism Summit in Quebec** to ensure that ecotourism follows a sustainable path. The summit, an initiative of the World Tourism Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, was realized in partnership with Tourisme Québec and the Canadian Tourism Commission. Participants were expected to define the content and limits of the term ecotourism itself, so as to prevent its abuse and the dilution of its meaning; develop international standards for ecotourism by translating principles and guidelines such as the World Tourism Organization’s Global Code of Ethics, the UNEP Principles



Photo courtesy of World Ecotourism Summit  
**Charlevoix Biosphere Reserve, Québec**

for Sustainable Tourism and the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism in Vulnerable Ecosystems; create an international accreditation body for ecotourism and sustainable tourism as well as determine measures to ensure that local people benefit from ecotourism.

**May 16** – The **Philippines’ Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) presented the results of the Philippine Biodiversity Conservation Priorities Project (PBCPP)**, which identified, assessed, and prioritized specific geographical areas for biodiversity conservation. Spearheaded by the DENR’s Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB), Conservation International (CI), and the University of the Philippines (UP), the project had the participation of some 300 local and international scientists from more than 100 institutions and identified 170 terrestrial and inland water priority areas and 26 marine priority areas. The project also set the much-needed direction for the Philippine conservation community as a whole, and provided geographical information on areas that need urgent attention. Outputs included two-sided coloured maps, a CD-ROM database and a report that provides additional information on the priority areas.

**May 15** – **China** announced plans to spend several hundred billion yuan in the next 10 years to **protect forests and plant green belts** to combat blinding sandstorms, illegal logging, and rapid soil erosion. Recurring sandstorms have been blamed in part on overgrazing, over-harvesting of timber, forest clearance for cropland and rampant overuse of water resources. China has earmarked 10 billion yuan (US\$1.21 billion) a year for natural forest protection efforts formally launched in 2000, one of six key forestry programs to be underway by the end of 2002. A seeding program to

convert cropland to woods would raise forest and grass cover in China by 5%. The resulting green belts could reduce wind speeds by 30 to 50% and cut sand and dust by 99% over barren land.

**May 14** – **Bangladesh and India will work together under a United Nations plan to protect the ecosystem and biodiversity of Sundarban**, the world’s biggest mangrove forest shared by the two countries. UNESCO declared the Sundarban a world heritage site in 1997, and the U.N. Development Programme has funded projects to save it from degradation. Nearly two-thirds of the 9,630-square-km Sundarban lies in Bangladesh and the rest in India, stretching along the Bay of Bengal. Sundarban, which is home to the endangered royal Bengal tigers and a number of other unique species such as the Sundari tree, is currently facing a number of threats including illegal poaching, the felling of trees, and dwindling freshwater flow.



Photo courtesy of UNESCO  
**East Rennell Island World Heritage Site**

**May 8** – Australia and UNESCO signed a formal **Memorandum of Understanding on World Heritage issues in the Asia-Pacific**. Since the region is under-represented on the World Heritage List and a number of countries in the region have only recently joined the World Heritage Convention, the Memorandum will help Australia and UNESCO work together in partnership with regional nations in promoting the Convention and managing cultural and natural values in this heritage-rich part of the

planet. Pacific Island countries have places of outstanding heritage value, but only one site, East Rennell Island in the Solomon Islands, has been nominated and included on the World Heritage list. East Rennell is the largest example on Earth of a raised atoll. It also has the largest freshwater lake, Te Nggano, in the Pacific, a unique habitat for many species of plants, birds and animals that are found nowhere else on Earth.

**April 25** – The British Antarctic Survey announced that **armies of barnacles, mollusks, sea worms, and other marine organisms are travelling on discarded plastic and other human-made rubbish and invading Antarctica and tropical islands**, threatening native species. The findings are based on a 10-year study of human litter washed ashore on 30 remote islands around the globe. Regulations forbidding the dumping of waste from ships has begun to make a difference, but more needs to be done because once an invading organism gets into an area, it is impossible to remove it. Studies will be expanded to include other islands, such as the Andamans, L’Ile Amsterdam, Bermuda, Chagos, Cocos/Christmas and Trinidad.

**April 19** – Peter Ng, director of a museum on biodiversity at the National University of Singapore, announced that **Singapore’s only unique wild animals** – the Cream-coloured Giant Squirrel and the Banded Leaf Monkey – **face extinction due to urbanisation and shrinking forests**. Less than 20 Banded Leaf Monkeys and no more than four squirrels still live in what is left of the tiny island nation’s forests. Their likely extinction will mean the end of the last animal sub-species found only in Singapore. The government is currently working with local groups to study and protect the animals. But with only 3% of the island set aside for parks, efforts to breed the animals in captivity and reintroduce

them to the forests are likely to fail.

**April 17** – Researchers have identified a **new order of insects known as Mantophasmatodea**, a predatory animal that resembles a mix between a stick insect and a preying mantis. This first discovery of a new insect order since 1915 brings the total number of insect orders to 31. The existence of a living population was discovered on Brandberg Mountain in western Namibia. Brandberg is a 120-million year old massif, isolated from other mountains by hundreds of miles of barren sand.



Photo courtesy of National Museum of Namibia  
**Brandberg Massif**

**April 17** – IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) announced the availability of **key guidelines for protected areas in East Asia**, namely: Guidelines for Tourism in Parks and Protected Areas of East Asia; Guidelines for the Implementation of an Exchange Programme for Protected Areas in East Asia; Guidelines for Financing Protected Areas in East Asia; and the Directory of Protected Areas in East Asia – People, Organisations and Places. These are the results of projects initially outlined in the "Regional Action Plan for Protected Areas in East Asia" (1996) and completed with the support of the Nature Conservation Bureau of Japan.

**April 15** – Indonesia is planning to impose a **permanent ban on log exports** to protect its dwindling tropical forests. In October 2001, the ministers of industry and trade and forestry issued a joint decree putting in place a temporary ban on exports of logs for

wood chips, which expired in April. Indonesia's rainforests have been over-logged for years.

**April 12** - The Exploration Company ([www.theexplorationcompany.com](http://www.theexplorationcompany.com)) has released the **Wide Ranging World Map**, featuring ecological and cultural details never before shown in a world wall map. The map replaces elevation with the rendition of terrain (deserts, forests, savanna). In addition to displaying all countries, active border disputes and key cities, the map notes cultural regions (Kashmir, Scotland, Transylvania) and prominent indigenous nations (Kurds, Palestinians, Inuit). The map also indicates population density and areas where natural vegetation has been replaced with cropland, along with marine pollution, radioactive contamination, and destroyed rainforests.

**April 12** – Delegates at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity discussed the **Global Strategy for Plant Conservation**, and agreed on targets to guide and monitor the progress of its implementation. Sustainable use, capacity building, education and awareness, increased networking, and community involvement are vital elements of the Strategy.

**April 10** – Long-term studies by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) show that **uncontrolled hunting and trade form the greatest threats to wildlife and wild lands in Asia**. Current patterns of hunting and wildlife trade could drive wildlife to extinction. It adds that over half the prime protected areas in tropical Asia have already lost at least one large mammal due to hunting. Economically valuable species such as Sumatran and Javan rhinos and Siamese crocodiles are specifically targeted and are nearly extinct across Indochina. WCS recommendations include renewal of government commitment to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered

Species (CITES); restriction or elimination of commercial wildlife trade across the region and strengthening of government capacity to protect wildlife in protected areas and forest reserves.



Photo courtesy of Richard Grassy

**Rhino in Royal Chitwan National Park**

**April 8** – Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) revealed that **39 endangered one-horned rhinoceros have been found dead**, most due to poaching, during the past 12 months in Royal Chitwan National Park. One-horned rhinos are critically endangered around the world and slightly more than 1,800 one-horned rhinos presently survive in the wild. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Royal Chitwan National Park in the Terai, the southern plains of the Kingdom of Nepal, is home to 529 one-horned rhinos, according to a rhino census in 1999. Their numbers are up from a census conducted in 1994, which put the rhino population in the park at 466.

**April 5** – The **Banbai tribal people of New South Wales have made a decision to manage and conserve their Wattlebridge traditional land** for the protection and conservation of its natural and cultural values, making it the area's first indigenous protected area (IPA). Wattlebridge includes 480 hectares of botanically unique bushland on outcropping



Photo courtesy of Margaret Turton

**Spotted-tail quoll in New South Wales**

granite country. Not logged for 30 years, it is the last unprotected remnant in the New England region. The IPA is also home to at least 15 flora species and 12 rare and/or endangered fauna species, including the glossy black cockatoo, the masked owl and the spotted-tailed quoll.

**April 5** – Over 150 participants convened in The Hague for the **16th session of the Global Biodiversity Forum (GBF)** to tackle key biodiversity issues prior to the 6th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and in the run-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The GBF focused on business, communication and livelihoods since these are the underpinnings of both the sustainability and biodiversity debates. Key issues are: Managing Forest Ecosystems for Sustainable Livelihoods; Biodiversity Plans for Business; and Mainstreaming Biodiversity – the Role of Communication, Education and Public Awareness.

**April 4** – In a bid to alleviate increasing pressures on various ecosystems, IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM) provides expert **guidance on integrated ecosystem approaches to the management of natural and modified ecosystems**. From 2002 to 2004 CEM will establish baseline information on state-of-the-art restoration methods in different ecosystem types such as forests, arid lands, mangroves and coral reefs. Indicators will be identified as the first step to assessing the status of ecosystems and defining categories of ecosystem threats. CEM will also focus on assessing and promoting practical applications of the Convention on Biological Diversity's 12 principles that encourage a participatory and pragmatic approach to managing ecosystems to meet the livelihood requirements of people while conserving biological diversity. ■