

## First and second quarter in a nutshell

**June 26** – A group of 50 red-shanked douc langurs (*Pygathrix nigripes*) was discovered in the Phong Dien Nature Reserve in Vietnam during a survey of primates carried out by the Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies of Vietnam National University in Hanoi, together with the Thua Thien-Hue Forest Protection Department. This is the biggest group of douc langurs ever found in their natural habitat. The red-shanked douc langur, which lives mainly in the highlands of the tropical forests of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, is a rare and endangered species that needs to be protected from large-scale hunting and logging. This pretty primate usually lives in groups of between five and 10 individuals.



**A male Gurney's pitta**  
Photo by P.D. Round, courtesy of BirdLife International

**June 6** – BirdLife International announced the **rediscovery of Gurney's pitta** (*Pitta gurneyi*) in southern Myanmar 89 years after the last of its species was seen. Gurney's pitta is a brilliantly coloured secretive bird of the forest floor and is known in peninsular Thailand and adjacent southern Tenasserim, Myanmar. The discovery was made by a team of conservationists from BirdLife International, the Bird Enthusiasts and Nature Conservation Association, and the Myanmar Department of Forests during a month-long survey of lowland forests in southern Myanmar. Gurney's pitta is close to extinction and is classified on the IUCN-World Conservation Union Red List as critically endangered. BirdLife says that the last confirmed record of Gurney's pitta from Myanmar was in 1914. These birds occur in secondary, regenerating, lowland semi-evergreen

forest, with understoreys containing Salacca palms, in which they nest. Territories are centred on gully systems where moist conditions prevail in all seasons, usually with access to water, and often close to the forest edge. The surviving Gurney's Pittas in Myanmar are threatened by the rapid clearance of their forest habitat to make way for logging, both official and illegal, and conversion to croplands, fruit orchards, coffee, rubber and oil palm plantations.

**June 5** – The United Nations led global celebrations of World Environment Day with the theme: **Water—Two Billion People are Dying for It!** Already about one-third of the world's population lives in countries suffering from moderate-to-high water stress, according to the most recent Global Environment Outlook (GEO-3) report. Water stress is defined as areas where water consumption is more than 10% of renewable freshwater resources. Many of the remedies available for conserving and managing freshwater resources are politically and socially difficult; many rivers, lakes, and underground aquifers cross national boundaries and can be shared by several countries. But water experts agree that adopting long-term goals is imperative. The crisis is largely that of water governance, essentially caused by the ways in which global populations mismanage water. Some two million tons of waste per day are disposed of within receiving waters, including industrial wastes and chemicals, human waste and agricultural wastes. Agriculture accounts for over 80% of world water consumption, and yet around 60% of the water used for irrigation is wasted, lost to leaky canals, evaporation, and mismanagement. Fertilizer and pesticide residues from agricultural activities also contribute to contamination of fresh water resources. Pragmatic management approaches are necessary to address the water crisis, such as increasing public and gov-

ernment awareness, properly funding the agencies that manage groundwater, supporting community management, and encouraging the use of incentives and disincentives particularly in poorer countries and rural areas.

**May 19** – Environmentalists will ask the Administrative Court to **halt the construction of a 15-kilometre dam being built across the Kwan Phayao reservoir in Thailand**, which they say poses a threat to the Ramsar protected wetlands area. Initially proposed as a flood-prevention measure, environmentalists believe that the dam would instead lead to more flooding in the local area, severely affecting villagers living along the banks of the reservoir. Some authorities have decreed that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was unnecessary since the project was too small. Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT), however, countered that "the reservoir is protected under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and according to a cabinet resolution issued on 01 August 2000, any development is not permissible without an EIA." WFT was making inquiries in its capacity as a member of the Subcommittee on Wetland Management and the National Water Commission.

**May 16** – In a bid to **halt illegal logging in Indonesia**, the Rainforest Action Network (RAN) called on U.S. companies to "halt all purchases of Indonesian wood and pulp until the rights of indigenous people ... are recognized and the Indonesian government agrees to stamp out illegal logging." Forestry authorities say illegal logging in Indonesia has reached 50.7 million cubic metres per year with a predicted annual loss of \$3.42 billion. Indonesia's forests cover more than 120 million hectares (296 million acres) but the annual degradation in the past four years has reached two million hectares. Most of the woodlands are located in far-flung areas of the world's largest archi-

pelago, where monitoring is weak and corruption is rampant.

**May 16** – The IUCN-World Conservation Union released a study stating that **a rare freshwater dolphin found only in China's huge Yangtze River could die out within the next 10 years** unless fishing methods change. The study added that the Yangtze dolphin, the baiji, could quickly be followed into extinction by the Vaquita porpoise of Mexico's Gulf of California, New Zealand's Hector's dolphin, and several populations of whales. Larger whales like the blues, humpbacks and sperm, whose meat is prized by some nations, have long been the focus of protection efforts and many are still under threat. But the IUCN said it was the lesser-known and smaller cetaceans, often found only in developing countries, which were in special danger. To save it, the report said, the dolphin should be protected from snag-line and electric fishing, while off northern Mexico efforts had to be made to ensure that the vaquita is not caught in nets intended to sweep up fish. Source: Reuters News Service

**May 15** – Environmentalists fear that the **critically endangered Mekong giant catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*) may disappear completely from Thailand**. There have been no reports of capture of the giant catfish since 2001. Called Pla Buek in Thai, the giant catfish can weigh as much as 650 pounds and measure up to 10 feet in length. It is the largest scaleless freshwater fish in the world. Threats to the giant catfish include commercial fishing, its reputation as a food said to impart wisdom, and dynamite blasting of their spawning ground. One of the projects launched to protect the giant catfish and other endangered fish species in the area is the Mekong Fish Conservation Project. The project is supported by the National Geographic Society's Conservation Trust, the Cambodian Department of Fisheries, and



**The Mekong giant catfish is the largest scaleless freshwater fish in the world.**

Photograph by Zeb Hogan, University of California, Davis

the conservation group, Save Cambodia's Wildlife. The project initially began in Chiang Khong, Thailand, in 2000 but was moved to Cambodia in 2001 due to the collapse of Thailand's giant catfish fishery. Although the catfish populations are also low, Cambodia is now the last place in the world where the giant catfish is captured on a regular basis. As part of the project, researchers buy live giant catfish from fishers in Cambodia. They weigh and measure the fish, gather DNA samples for genetic studies, tag endangered fish, and release them back into the wild. A handful of endangered fish, including the giant catfish, are also kept alive to provide insight into fish migration patterns, habitat use, and mortality rates. Environmentalists are hopeful that such efforts will lead toward more sustainable management of Cambodia's fisheries," said Hogan.

**May 7 – A three-year project has been launched to promote the sustainable management of forests in Vietnam.** Led by the Swiss and the Vietnamese governments in partnership with World Wide Fund for Nature-Indochina, the project aims to protect Vietnamese forests from over exploitation to ensure that future generations will still be able to take advantage of their country's natural resources. The Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) has allocated \$US500,000 to support the project, which focuses both on

conserving tropical forests and the wise use and trade in forest products. The main objective of the project, which will be coordinated by WWF Indochina, is to promote sustainable forest management. This will be achieved, in part, by developing and implementing forest certification in Gia Lai Province, a first for Vietnam and Switzerland. Certification will be based on the internationally acknowledged criteria of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

**May 5 – Three major wetland areas in Pakistan are now protected by the Ramsar Convention** on Wetlands of International Importance. Totalling over one million hectares, the sites are all wildlife sanctuaries and all in Sindh Province. These are the Deh Akro-II Desert Wetland Complex, the Indus Delta — 5th largest delta system in the world and home to the 7th largest mangrove forest system — and the Rann of Kutch, part of the great Thar desert. Pakistan now has 19 Ramsar sites covering 1,343,627 hectares.

**April 28 – Rare pictures of the threatened Eld's deer (*Cervus eldii*, sub-species *siamensis*)** were obtained recently by a team of conservationists from World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Cambodia, Birdlife/World Conservation Society-Cambodia, and Cambodia's Department of Forestry and Wildlife. This species is one of the priorities of WWF's Central Indochina Dry Forest Ecoregional Conservation Programme, due to the global significance of the population within the ecoregion and the highly significant threats to its continued existence. Most conservation biologists believe the *siamensis* sub-species is glo-



**Eld's deer (*Cervus eldii*, sub-species *siamensis*).**

© WWF Indochina

bally endangered, and perhaps critically endangered and close to extinction. The rapid population decline of this species in the last 50 to 60 years in Cambodia and Laos is attributed primarily to hunting, as extensive suitable habitat remains where the species is no longer present. Many parts of the animal are used in traditional medicines, and the species is on the CITES Appendix I list, which bans international trade in listed species.

**April 18 – Chinese scientists have found 11 wild giant pandas in northern China,** showing the endangered species is still holding on despite threats to its habitat. Six pandas were found in the Foping nature reserve in the north-western province of Shaanxi, with the males fighting among themselves to mate with the female. Five more were found nearby. The discovery was highly unusual since the panda is an elusive creature and scientists have often had to depend on paw tracks and excrement to tally the panda population. There are an estimated 1,500 pandas in the wild, with over half living in foggy, mountainous nature reserves in southwestern China. Logging has been the biggest threat to the endangered black-and-white panda, destroying its natural habit of forests with undergrowth of bamboo, its staple food. Poaching, though rare, is also a threat. Illegal hunters are subject to prison terms of more than 10 years. Traps set for other animals such as deer and bears have accidentally killed pandas. China has set up two breeding centres that aim to reintroduce captive pandas into the wild. But all the 200 pandas sent to the wild have either fallen sick or been injured in the wild, forcing them back into captivity.

**April 17 – The IUCN-World Conservation Union and the International Ranger Federation (IRF) have joined forces in a "protect the protectors" initiative** to bring attention to the risks faced by rangers in protected areas. The collaboration, launched at the recent 4th World Ranger Congress held in Victoria, Australia,

seeks to draw international attention to the increasing dangers rangers face and to enhance their safety. The meeting adopted a resolution to be taken to the upcoming 5<sup>th</sup> IUCN World Parks Congress, which is expected to promote measures to secure the better protection of rangers and also for the protected areas they care for. Rangers and others working in the field level often find themselves in the frontline of a conservation battle to protect our precious wildlife, plants and heritage. IUCN and the IRF are committed to profiling this important issue at the 5<sup>th</sup> IUCN World Parks Congress. The Congress will encourage measures and action to allow rangers to work safely in managing our parks and protected areas for present and future generations.

Source: IUCN-The World Conservation Union



**The leopard cat**

Photo by Narong Suwannarong

**April 7 – Researchers in Thailand have succeeded in monitoring the movements of seven carnivorous mammal species** in the Phu Khieo forest, particularly the marbled cat, clouded leopard, Asiatic golden cat, leopard cat, binturong (largest member of the family that includes civets and mongooses), dhole (Asian wild dog) and yellow-throated marten. Their work is shedding light on the mysterious lives of these predators. Over the past four years, researchers have been studying mammalian carnivores in the sanctuary. They observe the behaviour of the animals - both directly and by examining the tracks and signs they leave behind - and trap the animals to fit them with radio collars. These collars enable the researchers to monitor the animals' activities as well as to determine their foraging ranges. So far 17 carnivorous mammal species have been trapped in their study areas. However, due to lack of money

and manpower, only seven have been tagged with radio collars. The study is still in the data-gathering phase; once completed, the study will reveal precious information about the carnivorous mammals of the Phu Khieo forest and will be used to improve wildlife conservation in the sanctuary.

**March 24** – A report called **Winged Messengers: The Decline of Birds** from the Worldwatch Institute states that pressures from the global human population has put about 12% of the world's 9,800 bird species at risk of extinction. Declining bird populations mark the unravelling of delicate natural balances since they are valuable environmental indicators.



**The endangered Hawaiian moorhen is threatened by loss of wetland habitat.**

Photo by John and Karen Hollingsworth courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Population growth or decline of bird species can offer early warnings of impending environmental problems, in particular dangerous levels of pesticides and insecticides. Island bird species have been at particular risk of extinction at the hands of humans – 93% of bird extinctions recorded since 1500 have occurred on islands. The report provides details on the impacts of major threats, including habitat loss, predators, poaching, conflict and climate change, on bird populations.

**March 18** – The most comprehensive database of the world's river basins, the **Watersheds of the World CD**, was released at the 3rd World Water Forum in Osaka, Japan. The CD presents maps on twenty global issues as well as key maps, data and indicators of 154 of the world's basins. It also provides an analysis of



**The white headed duck is an endangered bird that lives in the Persian Gulf. Its population suffered from the Persian Gulf War of 1991.**

Photo courtesy of Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

the state of the world's river basins, including the environmental goods and services they provide. The Watersheds of the World CD offers the best information available on the river basins of the world and serves as a vital reference for the general public.

**March 14** – **Key Sites for Conservation in Vietnam**, a new report from BirdLife International, asserts that wildlife is disappearing quickly in 56 out of Vietnam's 63 protected areas. These areas have become accessible to hunters as new road networks open up areas that have been isolated for centuries. After poaching, the next most serious threat



**The golden-winged laughing thrush is one of three new species discovered during the fieldwork for BirdLife's publication.**

Drawing courtesy of BirdLife International

to Vietnam's wildlife is agricultural intensification, which affects 43 conservation sites. The BirdLife study is a two-year effort funded by DANIDA and identifies the most important places for biodiversity conservation in Vietnam. The publication describes a network of Important Bird Areas, the protection of which would go a long way towards the conservation of biodiversity and the wider environment

in Vietnam. In all, 63 areas qualify as Important Bird Areas and total 1.69 million hectares. Of these, 28 Important Bird Areas are within protected areas. The global Important Bird Area programme co-ordinated by BirdLife International aims to identify and protect a network of critical sites for the world's birds using standardised, internationally agreed criteria. In Vietnam, the IBA programme is coordinated by BirdLife International in Indochina, in collaboration with the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources of the National Centre for Natural Science and Technology.

**March 12** – Wildlife experts are relieved that **50,000 Olive Ridley turtles crawled up an eastern Indian beach this week to lay eggs**, after the endangered animals missed nesting last year. Turtle experts believe that widespread illegal fishing along the 480-kilometre coast of Orissa state, where three protected turtle nesting grounds lie, is responsible for the deaths of 100,000 Olive Ridelies in the past 10 years. An Olive Ridley lays 120 to 150 eggs, from which hatchlings emerge after about 45 to 50 days. The eggs are often damaged by erosion or eaten by other animals such as wild boars, dogs, and jackals. Turtle experts plan to count the nests, turtles, and hatchlings and help forest officials protect them. For the past 20 years, trawler fishing has been illegal within 10 kilometres of the Orissa coast during the turtle nesting season. Conservationists assert that trawlers continue to violate the law.

**February 28** – IUCN-The World Conservation Union released **Turning the Tide: The Eradication of Invasive Species**. The new publication contains 52 papers and 21 abstracts from the International Conference on Eradication of Island Invasives that focused on the theme

"Eradication of invasive species from islands; methods used and the results achieved". The book includes a wide assortment of projects dealing with the ecological impacts of invasive alien species, and represents significant contributions from the IUCN/SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG). Abstracts of all papers featured in the publication are available on the IUCN/SSC Invasive Species Specialist Group website at <http://www.issg.org/>.

**February 14** – **Sweden said it would give 764 million kronor (US\$90 million) to the Global Environment Facility (GEF)**, raising an earlier pledge by 100 million kronor (US\$12 million), because the organisation needs more money to promote environmental projects in developing countries. In 2002, some 32 countries pledged a total of US\$2.92 billion to support the work of the fund over the next four years. The environmental fund, based within the headquarters of the World Bank in Washington, has allocated US\$4.2 billion over the past decade to support 1,000 environmental projects in 160 developing countries.

**February 9** – The **black-faced spoonbill**, a kind of migratory bird on the brink of extinction worldwide, has **reappeared in Hainan Province in southern China** after an absence of more than two decades. The black-faced spoonbill, a large-sized migratory bird native to Asia, including China, Russia, the Democratic Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Japan and Vietnam, has been designated as one of the most valuable species in eastern Asia for both research and protection. At present, there are only 800 of the birds worldwide, according to the IUCN-World Conservation Union. Taiwan Province has the world's largest number at 622. Hainan was once a

major winter habitat for the black-faced spoonbill, but the bird began disappearing from the region in the early 1980s.

**Source:** Forest Conservation Portal

**February 6** – Two new studies in the journal “Nature” agree that **invasive species gain a competitive advantage in their new homes** because they leave behind their native parasites and diseases. This escape from illness gives non-native pests - now second only to habitat destruction in threatening biodiversity - a headstart in displacing native



**This European green crab has a knob-like parasitic barnacle attached to its underside.**

Photo by Todd Huspeni, courtesy of UCSB

species. Globalisation of commerce, particularly by ships and air traffic, transports hitchhiking plants and animals around the world, and in many cases these become pests in their new locations. Two teams of researchers - one targeting animals and the other focusing on plants - have drawn the same conclusion regarding the reason for the success of these invaders: freedom from disease. One team conducted parasite studies of 26 invasive animal species, from snails to rats, comparing them in natural habitats and invaded habitats. In general, the introduced populations had only half as many parasites as native populations of the same species. Among the animals the researchers studied was the European green crab, which had a devastating effect on U.S. fisheries. In Europe, the green crab’s native home, parasitic barnacles castrated the crabs. Where the barnacles were common, the crabs were small and rare.

But in areas where barnacles were uncommon, crabs grew large and abundant. The same pattern holds true for invasive plants. At least 473 alien plant species from Europe have invaded and established colonies in the United States as noxious weeds. The most successful carried few parasites with them, and were resistant to North American diseases.

**January 31** – **Indian researchers from the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad have asked Iran to loan them a pair of cheetahs in the hope of cloning the species.**

The cheetah has been extinct from India for more than 50 years. The cheetah is similar to the leopard and is the fastest animal on land - capable of reaching 100 kilometres per hour (60 mph) in short spurts. It disappeared from India following large-scale hunting during British rule that ended in 1947 but is still found in parts of Iran. The Centre plans to set up a large laboratory to revive endangered species such as the cheetah as part of a project worth \$2.3 million. An Indian leopard would be able to serve as a surrogate mother for a cloned cheetah. Researchers hope that the project could pave the way for the conservation of other endangered species such as Indian tigers and lions.



**Researchers hope to reintroduce cheetahs to India**

Photo courtesy of Murihiku Expeditions

**January 27** – The **Auckland Islands Marine Reserve** is closer to becoming a reality now that the application of New Zealand’s Department of Conservation for this protected status has been approved. The Aucklands, which are sub-Antarctic



**Sea lion pup on the Auckland Islands tagged by the NZ Department of Conservation**

Photo courtesy of Murihiku Expeditions

islands south of New Zealand, offer a haven for marine mammals and sea birds. When established, the 484,000-hectare site will become New Zealand’s second largest marine reserve, safeguarding the main breeding ground for the threatened Hooker’s sea lion, southern right whale, and yellow-eyed penguin. Other species found in the area include black, grey-faced and Cook’s petrels, Buller’s shearwaters, blue penguins, Australasian gannets, Arctic skua, Bryde’s whales, common and bottlenose dolphins and orcas. The Auckland Islands have the richest flora of all the sub-Antarctic islands - 233 taxa have been recorded, of which 196 are native.

**January 21** – A state of the environment report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reveals that South Asia is suffering from excessive land degradation, desertification, and habitat fragmentation, depleting the forest products that are sources of food, medicine and income for indigenous people. The publication is aimed at policy makers and was released during the Special Session of the Governing Council of the South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme. The **South Asia State of the Environment Report** identifies five key environmental issues: livelihood security, environmental disasters, industrialization, urbanisation and biodiversity loss. It urged institutions and policy makers to do more to integrate environmental and socio-economic factors into decision-making and to

ensure trade liberalization does not compromise the environment and erode natural resources. Information for the report came from the newly published national State of the Environment Reports for Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Iran, funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. Another report called the **“Children of the Monsoon”** offers the youth a perspective on the state of the environment and was written by members of youth organisations, which make up the South Asia Youth Environment Network (SAYEN), established by UNEP in Kathmandu in June 2002.



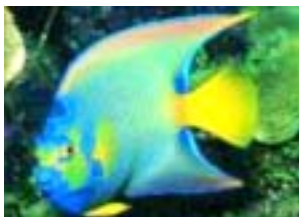
**Royal Bengal tiger in Nepal**

Photo courtesy of Safari Narayani

**January 20** – Reduced presence of armed forces in Nepal’s national parks has led to the **death of two Royal Bengal tigers**. An adult male tiger roaming in the Royal Bardiya National Park was found poisoned to death, according to officials at the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation. Another tiger, this time a female, was shot dead last week in Royal Chitwan National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Endangered wild animals are often at risk due to conflict between wild animals and people living around national parks and wildlife reserves. The conflict has many times resulted in the poisoning of wild animals, which frequently come out of the national parks and destroy agricultural products and attack people. The population of Royal Bengal tigers in Nepal’s protected areas is estimated at around 100, but the total population of the species has yet to be counted. This wildcat species is included in the

government's list of protected animals. Killing tigers or trading in tiger body parts can draw up to 10 years of imprisonment under Nepalese laws.

**January 14** – A report by the Pew Oceans Commission stresses that integrated networks of marine reserves offer the best formula for protecting and preserving marine resources. Marine reserves are areas in which no extractive use of any living creature, fossil, or mineral resource, or any habitat destruction, is allowed. The report, **“Marine Reserves: A Tool for Ecosystem Management and Conservation,”** finds that marine reserves also contribute to the recovery of larger marine ecosystems. This report is the final one in a series by the Pew Oceans Commission, a non-profit organisation that is conducting a comprehensive review of U.S. ocean policy. The Pew Oceans Commission reports have found the world's oceans are threatened by a daunting list of problems - overfishing, habitat alteration, recreational threats, pollutants, agricultural runoff, aquaculture, introduced species, climate change and coastal development. The current report recommends that a network of reserves should be implemented immediately in all major marine habitats in U.S. coastal waters. In addition to the report on marine reserves, three reports on the state of the U.S. commercial fishing industry were released by the Pew Oceans Commission. These reports address the issues surrounding the industry's declining economic status, which is



**Queen angelfish like this one lives in Caribbean waters.**  
Photo courtesy of Reef Environmental Education Fund



**There are more than 6,000 species of plants and animals in the waters of the Florida Keys.**  
Photo courtesy of Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

largely the result of excess competition, declining productivity, and poor management. For more on the Pew Oceans Commission please see: <http://www.pewoceans.org/>

**January 13** – IUCN urged the Governments that share the Mekong River to fully consider the threats to biodiversity imposed by the blasting of shoals and rapids undertaken as part of the **Upper Mekong Navigation Improvement Project.** The Project proposes the blasting of 21 rapids, shoals and reefs in the river as part of a scheme to allow 500-tonne ships to navigate the river. Economically important fish species as well as fish species on the verge of extinction, such as the giant catfish, depend on these rapids and shoals. The blasting of their habitat may put these fish in danger and increase the risk of their extinction. The Mekong is home to an estimated 1,200 species and is only surpassed in richness by the Amazon and Congo rivers. The giant catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*) is already listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and the proposed blasting of its only known spawning site will detrimentally affect it. Another species of large catfish (*Pangasius sanitwongsei*) is reported to undertake similar spawning migrations in the same area, and is currently assessed by the Red List as Data Deficient. Without thorough assessment of freshwater species, biodiversity can be

lost even before it is known. IUCN is concerned that continuing the Project without undertaking a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment conflicts with the obligations of Governments under international agreements. IUCN does not contradict the importance of river transport, but it urges the parties to the Agreement on Commercial Navigation on Lancang -Mekong River to carry out a comprehensive EIA before any further blasting work is carried out. Taking out the proposed rock outcrops could reduce water flows in the river during the dry season and significantly affect downstream fisheries and biodiversity.



**Black-faced spoonbills**  
Photo courtesy of the Taiwan Government

**January 14** – An outbreak of **avian botulism has killed 71 endangered black-faced spoonbills** in the Tseng-wen Estuary in Taiwan over the past month, according to the Wild Bird Federation Taiwan, the BirdLife International Partner organisation in Taiwan. The deaths account for more than 7% of the world population of 969 individual birds. Avian experts attribute the disease to unusually high winter temperatures at Tseng-wen Estuary, the most important wintering site in the world for the species. The estuary holds more than 70% of the global population of black-faced spoonbills. Black-faced spoonbills breed on islets off the west coast of the Korean Peninsula and China. There are major wintering wetland sites in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, China, Japan, Macao and South Korea. An action plan involving these major range states has resulted in co-ordinated actions, including satellite tracking and field surveys, which have added to

knowledge of migratory movements and identified important breeding and passage sites. Japanese and Korean scientists have also been invited to investigate the epidemic in hopes of preventing the disease.

**January 9** – IUCN-The World Conservation Union launched **Ecoagriculture: Strategies to Feed the World and Save Wild Biodiversity**, which is authored by Jeffrey A. McNeely, Chief Scientist at IUCN and Sara J. Scherr, Senior Policy Analyst at Forest Trends and Senior Advisor to the Future Harvest Foundation. The publication examines the global impact of agriculture on wild biodiversity; describes the challenge of reconciling biodiversity conservation and agricultural goals; outlines and discusses the Ecoagriculture approach; and presents diverse case studies that illustrate key strategies.



**Threatened by the fishing and mining industries, dolphins in the Irrawaddy River are now at risk of becoming an endangered species.**

**January 6** – Dolphins in the Irrawaddy River in Myanmar have declined in number and may become an endangered species. The New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) found just 37 dolphins in a 550-km stretch of the river between Bhamo in northern Kachin state and Mingun near Mandalay, compared to 59 animals in a 1998 survey. ‘The population of the dolphins is isolated to a limited area. The survey indicated they were at risk of becoming an endangered species in Myanmar. Major threats to the dolphins are nets, the use of electrical charges to catch fish, and mercury run-off from gold mines. ■