



WWF CONSERVATION PULSE

JANUARY 2016

This first edition of *Conservation Pulse* in 2016 brings news of an exceptional achievement in helping to secure 100 million hectares of wetlands as Ramsar sites to be protected and sustainably managed. There is also good news on the wildlife crime front, with the Hong Kong government's decision to explore phasing out its domestic ivory market – one of the key markets responsible for the demand for ivory resulting in the ongoing slaughter of Africa's elephants. There are also rhino protection successes in Nepal, while in South Africa – home to the world's largest number of rhino – aggressive anti-poaching efforts may finally be blunting the poaching menace after eight years of escalating butchery. There are further major successes in the campaign to protect Europe's nature laws, the all-important Birds and Habitats Directives and the Natura 2000 protected area network, and in Canada a long-standing negotiation has resulted in a fabulous new rainforest conservation complex with the potential to extend into the marine environment.

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WWF wetlands milestone reached

The area of wetlands designated for protection and sustainable management under the Ramsar Convention, with WWF's support, has reached 100 million hectares worldwide, with the declaration of Zimbabwe's first seven Ramsar sites. This milestone, announced on World Wetlands Day, 2 February, means WWF has supported 45 per cent of the 215 million hectares of Ramsar wetlands designated since the convention was signed in 1971. The new sites in Zimbabwe include the iconic Victoria Falls. Wetlands are among the most biologically diverse ecosystems and also provide key functions such as water purification and stabilization of water flows during floods and drought – yet more than 70 per cent of the world's wetlands have been lost in the last century. Protection and restoration of wetlands remains a WWF priority due to their conservation importance and role in supporting sustainable development.



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Major new conservation complex underway

WWF applauds the agreement reached in Canada's British Columbia after 20 years of negotiations to protect 85 per cent of the rainforest from logging. In 2007, after 10 years of civil unrest over proposals to log this old-growth rainforest, government, forest companies, First Nations and environmental organizations agreed a world-leading model of ecosystem management, which WWF recognized as a Gift to the Earth to encourage the further development of the initiative. Close to a further 10 years later, this lengthy process has resulted in a commitment to protect 6.4 million hectares along the coast. The remaining 15 per cent will be accessible for logging, but will have to meet stringent sustainability standards. WWF is now calling on government and First Nations to complete the process by moving to protect the coastal and marine zone of the Great Bear Sea bordering the rainforest – one of the world's most biologically rich and diverse coldwater marine environments – to create a globally significant forest, freshwater and marine conservation complex with stunning arrays of terrestrial and marine species.



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Building on rhino protection in Nepal and South Africa

Increased anti-poaching efforts have achieved the first annual decrease in rhinos killed in South Africa since 2007 – but poachers are targeting rhinos in neighbouring countries. In 2015, 1,175 rhinos were killed in South Africa, 40 less than in 2014. However, at least 130 were poached in Namibia and Zimbabwe in the same period, up almost 200 per cent from 2014. The organized criminal syndicates driving the rhino poaching crisis are turning their aim on previously secure populations in other African countries. But there is hope. While there are signs that South Africa is stabilizing poaching, and must improve further, Nepal has shown that it is possible to stop it. Nepal has already achieved three years of zero rhino poaching since 2011 and is close to a fourth – a remarkable achievement, and one that other countries can emulate by adopting the zero-poaching framework that WWF helped to develop. Supported by numerous international organizations, there is now a one-stop website for countries to access the best available tools and resources in the zero-poaching toolkit – zeropoaching.com.



WWF-NEPAL

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Boost for WWF's campaign on Hong Kong ivory trade

A series of countries central to the illegal ivory trade have now made a commitment to cease or regulate their domestic ivory markets. The latest announcement by Hong Kong, that it is to explore phasing out the trade, follows similar decisions by China and the USA and Thailand's moves to regulate its domestic trade. Hong Kong's decision represents a significant success for WWF's campaign to ban the city's ivory trade. Launched in 2015, the campaign has gained the support of other organizations, members of the Legislative Council and more than 70,000 people. This decision is also an indication of how fast national policy is changing and how international momentum to tackle illegal wildlife trade is building. Last year saw the unanimous adoption of the historic UN General Assembly Resolution on wildlife crime and closed with China agreeing with African nations to jointly scale up their response to wildlife crime during the 6th Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Next up is the European Union's new action plan to combat wildlife trafficking, which is to be launched on World Wildlife Day on 3 March 2016.



WWF-HONG KONG/LAM CHUN-YUEN

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Huge majority of EU Parliament votes for nature

An overwhelming majority of Members of the European Parliament (592 vs 52 MEPs) voted this week against a revision of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, a further important step in support of WWF's campaign to save Europe's most important nature laws and the world's biggest network of protected areas, Natura 2000. WWF congratulated the Parliament for agreeing that proposals to revise the Directives "would result in weakened legislative protection and financing, and would be bad for nature, for people and for business". In line with WWF, other non-governmental organizations and EU governments, the Parliament calls for better management and sufficient financing and coherence with other EU policies – such as agriculture and energy – to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2020. A final decision by EU Environment Ministers is expected by the end of 2016. Progress can be followed on WWF's Keep Nature Alive campaign website.



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