

NEWS IN BRIEF

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JONNY KEELING

NEW MAMMALS IN NEW GUINEA VOLCANO

An expedition team including BBC cameramen and a PTES-funded scientist have discovered a new species of giant rat in the forested Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea.

The rat was one of a number of exotic animals discovered in the crater of an extinct volcano, Mount Bosavi, during filming of the BBC programme *Lost Land of the Volcano*, which aired in September. The giant rat was first recorded using an infrared camera trap set by BBC wildlife cameraman Gordon Buchanan. The team immediately suspected it might be a new species, and their suspicions were confirmed when local Kasua trackers helped them find a living specimen.

Present when the rat was finally located were Kristofer Helgen, curator of mammals at Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., and zoologist Muse Opiang of the Papua New Guinea Institute

'I had a cat and it was about the same size as this rat' - wildlife cameraman Gordon Buchanan on coming face to face with the remarkably docile Bosavi giant woolly rat.

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of Biological Research, who has recently received a PTES grant for work on another local speciality, the long-beaked echidna.

The new species has been provisionally named the Bosavi woolly rat, though it has yet to be described and named scientifically. It is 82cm long and weighs about 1.5kg, making it one of the largest species of rat known. Its shaggy silvery brown fur equips it well for survival in the cool damp climate of the crater, which lies at about 1 000m above sea level. Not surprisingly for an animal that has no experience of humans, the rat appears remarkably tame.

Initial investigations suggest the rat belongs to the genus *Mallomys*. This is the second new species of New Guinea giant rat to be discovered in the area in as many years – in 2008 we reported the discovery of another *Mallomys* species by a team exploring the Foja Mountains with support from Conservation International.

To see footage of the Bosavi giant rat visit http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8210000/8210394.stm

EU HABITATS IN PERIL

Precious habitats across Europe are in a 'perilous state' according to a recent assessment of endangered wildlife areas in 25 EU countries. The report focuses on threatened habitats and species protected under the EU Habitats Directive and uses information provided by the governments of member states. It confirms that the vast majority of the continent's most important species remain in serious danger. The Atlantic biogeographical region – which includes the UK – is of the utmost concern, with scarcely more than 10% of threatened habitats in 'favourable condition' on average. A mere 6% of threatened UK habitats and only 23% of our threatened species were reported to be in 'favourable condition'. The report suggests that the EU as a whole is likely to miss its target to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010.

Director of conservation for the RSPB, Dr Mark Avery, commented that 'This report is further proof that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) remains a key threat to our wildlife. This report highlights the impact of traditional threats, such as agriculture, habitat destruction and development, but new threats, such as climate change, are emerging rapidly.'

For more information or to read a digest of the report, visit: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/knowledge/rep_habitats/docs/com_2009_358_en.pdf

ANTIBACTERIAL AGENT FOUND IN DOLPHINS

Recently published research has shown that the antibacterial agent triclosan, widely used in consumer products such as handwash and toothpaste and in hardware such as chopping boards and rubbish bags, is finding its way via the sewage

treatment system into the bodies of marine mammals.

Up to 5% of the triclosan flushed with domestic waste water finds its way into rivers and estuaries where it can persist indefinitely, affecting the natural balance of bacteria and algae, and building up in the bodies of other aquatic organisms. Blood samples were taken from wild bottlenose dolphins living off South Carolina and Florida. Triclosan was detected in 23-31% of animals, at levels ranging from 0.025 to 0.27 parts per billion. These levels are similar to those measured in human blood.

It is not known how widespread the contamination is and how it may affect the animals' health.

A large carnivorous mammal, bottlenose dolphins are at risk of accumulating potentially dangerous levels of environmentally persistent chemicals in their bodies.



LAURIE CAMPBELL

The researchers suggest further studies are needed to understand possible interactions and effects of triclosan, including its potential transformation into other toxic compounds and possible interference with hormone systems.

For more information on what the beavers have been up to there is a weekly blog at <http://blog.scottishbeavers.org.uk>

NEW SMALL MAMMAL SURVEY

A major new survey aiming to establish a national database of small mammals has recently been announced by our friends at The Mammal Society. The National Small Mammal Monitoring Scheme (NSMMS) relies on volunteer effort – those participating will be allocated a 1km square of land local to them, which they will be asked to survey. There are six different survey methods to choose from and volunteers can select whichever suits their level of experience or expertise. For example, you could easily do a bait-tube transect or search for harvest mice on your own, or you could join a local mammal group to get involved with live-trapping and learn more about small mammals.

If you want to take part, you can either do so through your local mammal group or as an individual. For details and to express interest in taking part, email small.mammals@mammal.org.uk, call The Mammal Society on 02380 237874, or write to them at 3 The Carronades, New Road, Southampton, SO14 0AA.



WILDSTORY.CO.UK

SCOTTISH BEAVERS

We've recently received a welcome update on the three families of beaver reintroduced at Knapdale as part of the Scottish Beaver Trial. The Loch Coille Bharr beaver family are busy building the first dam within the trial area. To make quite sure that the potential raised water levels don't have a negative impact upon important adjoining aquatic vegetation, a 'beaver deceiver' pipe has been installed at the base of the dam to allow water to pass through whilst retaining the dam as a feature that the trial can monitor longer term.

The family released onto the shores of Loch Linne/Fidhle continue to exhibit normal beaver behaviour. Along with feeding and burrow construction they appear to have been starting some small scale damming activity near the outflow to the main loch, which is also being monitored.

Following the sudden dispersal of the Creag Mhor Loch family of beavers soon after release, the adult male was located about 10km north of the trial area. In August he was recaptured and returned to the original release loch, where to date he appears to have stayed and is reported to be very busy felling and feeding on small broadleaved trees along the loch's edge.

Small mammal surveys not only inform us about populations of small mammals themselves, but also reveal an enormous amount about the overall health of an ecosystem.

Art for a good cause

Those of you who admired the award-winning snow leopard image on the back cover of the summer edition of *Mammals UK* may be interested to know that the print can be purchased direct from the photographer, Stephen Oachs. Visit Stephen's website www.stephenoachs.com to browse. Stephen is offering a 10% discount on the print to PTES supporters, or to donate 10% of the proceeds to the Snow Leopard Trust. Please email stephen@stephenoachs.com for details.



STEPHEN OACHS

Closer to home, wildlife artist and PTES supporter Sarais Crawshaw is opening her studio for visitors next month. If you're in the area, why not pop along to Appletrees, Main Street, Willey, Rugby, CV23 0SH on the weekend of 28th & 29th November 2009, 10am-5pm. You'll see drawings & paintings in pencil, pastels or acrylic paint and hear some of the stories behind the pictures.



SKIT AND POLISH BY SARAI'S CRAWSHAW

Originals, prints and greetings cards will be on sale, and Sarais will make a donation from the proceeds to PTES.