

MOUNTAINS OF CENTRAL ASIA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT



The Global Forest Coalition (GFC) is working with six local nongovernmental organizations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to strengthen their ability to improve the management of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs). Most recently, the international and Kyrgyz team was in the Kassan-Sai region, where, with the sponsorship of the Ala-Buka local administration, various community groups—including several women's groups—gathered to present their vision of the future for the area. Local awareness has

been raised about the importance of the ecosystem services provided by the Kassan-Sai KBA. Communities and local government administrators are forming partnerships and grievance mechanisms are being put in place. GFC returned with beautiful photos from the region, including images of the little fork-tailed finch (*Enicurus scouleri*). As the team points out, while the species is not globally threatened, it is only found along pristine rocky streams in the highest mountains, in beautiful and unspoiled places, showing the enduring value of conservation efforts in the region.

Plateau Perspectives, working with a Tajik partner, Anahita Public Organization, has begun work in the Yagnob Valley, only 72 kilometers from Dushanbe, but deep in the Pamir Mountains. In 2019, the Government of Tajikistan declared the Yagnob Valley as a national park. The valley is inhabited by about 650 Yagnobi people, an ethnic minority. Plateau Perspectives and Anahita Public Organization are working with the Yagnobi people so that they have formal co-management rights over the



park and the valley's resources. This will be a long and deliberate process, providing residents with basic training in wildlife monitoring, land management, and tourism promotion, as they request, such that the Yagnobi people will be partners with the government authorities. Plateau Perspectives tells the story of the first steps of this project, with stunning photography, [here](#).

WALLACEA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT



The grant to YAPEKA closed with several important results for the people of Sangihe, a small island midway between North Sulawesi (Indonesia) and Mindanao (Philippines). Living in such a remote location, the people of Sangihe have limited options for income generation and rely extensively on the sea. This includes fishing in seagrass areas that are home to dugongs (listed as Vulnerable by IUCN Red List) and collecting sea cucumbers,

which have an international market value as an additive for food and for traditional medicine. The problem is that the seagrass beds are home to non-threatened species of sea cucumbers, as well as threatened species, including the Endangered *Holothuria scabra*.

YAPEKA worked with communities on the eastern side of Sangihe to change fishing practices and provide alternatives that would enhance local income. Working closely with the North Sulawesi Provincial Fisheries and Marine Affairs Office, YAPEKA and the communities formally incorporated 7,178 hectares of sea into the Coastal and Small Islands Zoning Plan to discourage illegal and unsustainable fishing practices. This zoning plan then allowed the establishment of fish sanctuaries and sea cucumber cultivation zones, for the growth and harvest of non-threatened, commercially viable species. Working with the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, YAPEKA and the communities of Bukide Timur and Bulu are now harvesting and selling sea cucumbers, with 23 men and 37 women supplementing their income from this work. Further, the two villages have contributed \$25,000 of their own funds toward the effort.

INDO-BURMA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

The quarter saw the close of a grant to Conservation International's (CI) Cambodia Program, which supported local communities to respond to the problem of wildfire in the floodplain of Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia.

The Tonle Sap ecosystem supports the world's largest freshwater fishery, which makes a critical contribution to food security and economic development in Cambodia. The project supported four communities at Boeung Chhmar Ramsar Site to introduce community-based fire management. This included providing training, fire-fighting equipment and real-time information, developing fire management plans and establishing fire management funds within women's savings groups to provide a sustainable source of financing.



During the three fire seasons covered by the project, the community fire management teams successfully extinguished 13 fires, ten of which were detected thanks to a satellite wildfire alert service called OroraTech. Although the satellite service proved too complex for the communities to use directly, CI acted as an intermediary, receiving alerts and passing them on. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the approach was complicated due to wide variation in fire conditions (especially surface wetness) among years. Nevertheless, the community-based fire management teams appear to have been successful in fighting small fires, at least. Their effectiveness at preventing fires will be more apparent in a few years, as El Niño conditions are expected in 2024 and, possibly, subsequent years. The work begun under the CEPF grant is continuing with other sources of funding, and CI plans to evaluate and revise the approach to develop a working model that can be replicated in other communities around Tonle Sap Lake.

MEDITERRANEAN BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

In September, Morocco and Libya were subject to tragic natural disasters—western Morocco was struck by a magnitude 6.8 earthquake on 8 September and many aftershocks, while Libya suffered devastating flooding and landslides associated with a storm that struck on 10 September. Thousands of people lost their lives and many more were injured and lost their homes and livelihoods. CEPF grieves for the loss of life and extends its deepest condolences to the people of Morocco and Libya and their friends and loved ones.

In Morocco, CEPF has been in touch with our grantees in the extended Marrakech region, as well as Tahanout and Toubkhal, and we have been relieved to find there was no loss of life among our grantees and partners in the region, although a few suffered minor injuries and destruction is widespread.

In Libya, the staff members of our partner based in Derna, the organization Hayat Organization to Protect Wildlife and Marine Organism, were found to have escaped loss of life and injury; and our partners from Western Libya experienced no casualties directly. However, many have lost members of their families and friends.

In July, prior to these tragedies, the CEPF Donor Council held a hybrid in-person and virtual meeting, with the in-person meeting set in Tangier, Morocco. Following the meeting, Donor Council and Working Group members joined CEPF staff and regional implementation team



members to visit some CEPF-funded conservation projects.

CEPF thanks Donor Council, Working Group and donor representatives who joined in the field visits, including Donor Council Chairperson Julia Marton-Lefèvre; Global Environment Facility CEO and Chairperson Carlos Manuel Rodriguez; Conservation International Executive Vice President for Conservation Partnerships Sebastian Troëng; and European

Commission Team Leader for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Thierry Dudermel. We also thank the grantees who shared the details and results of their conservation efforts: Imad Cherkaoui of Association Nature Solutions; Ahmed El Harrad of Barbary Macaque Conservation; Rhimou El Hammoui, president of Groupe de Recherche pour la Protection des Oiseaux au Maroc (GREPOM).

The Mediterranean Hotspot was also featured in the photo exhibit "Mediterranean Life: Conserving Biodiversity for People," which was held 20 September at the Brussels Press Club. The exhibit highlights the wild beauty of the Mediterranean Basin region and the people working to ensure a future for these ecosystems, which provide vital services such as fresh water, food, fertile soils and climate change resilience. The display celebrates what has been achieved with 10+ years of conservation



investment from CEPF in the hotspot. CEPF Donor Council member Chantal Marijnissen, Head of Unit for Environment, Sustainable Natural Resources at the EU's Directorate-General for International Partnerships, spoke at the reception about what CEPF grantees have achieved in the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot. CEPF Executive Director Olivier Langrand and Grant Director Pierre Carret were also featured speakers.

MADAGASCAR AND THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

On 7 July 2023, IUCN-NL organized a masterclass on ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) that attracted 109 registrants. During the session, the concept of EbA was explained and concrete examples of EbA projects in the Madagascar and Indian Ocean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot were shared by Harisoa Hasina Rakotondrazafy and her team from WWF Madagascar as the invited experts.



From 8–24 July 2023, members of the hotspot's regional implementation team, CEPF Grant Director Peggy Poncelet and CEPF Grants Manager Annie Kaufmann came together in the Seychelles to look back at year one and plan for year two. In addition, site visits were made to the shortlisted applicants of the first call for proposals to improve the understanding of their project plans and provide recommendations on their project design.

TROPICAL ANDES BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Two recent meetings brought together grantees and partners and highlighted progress being made in the Tropical Andes Hotspot.

- CEPF's National Meeting of Partners and Allies in Peru, held on 14–15 September 2023, convened representatives of the 12 projects awarded to Peru in CEPF's current investment and a multi-country project that also includes Bolivia and Colombia.



Organizations working in the Kosñipata Carabaya KBA

(Cusco, Peru) discussed how to take advantage of ecotourism to work in a coordinated manner in the territory. For projects in the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) Cordillera de Colán, the need to take advantage of technical discussion panels used during project implementation was highlighted.

The second day was spent visiting the El Gran Mirador de Juningue Conservation Concession, managed by the small community of Juningue; and the Juningue Private Conservation Area, managed by the Hoyos family. Both sites are part of the project "Strengthening local capacities to improve the Management of Community Conservation Areas, Peru," implemented by the Asociación Amazónicas por la Amazonía (AMPA).

Participants learned about benefits generated by CEPF's investment in the KBAs of the Tropical Andes Hotspot by seeing impacts such as the development of a local roundtable helping to manage the sites with AMPA support. Roundtable participants have learned not only about conservation concession management, but also about product development and project design.

"We have been greatly strengthened by the training they give us every day on how to take care of our forests, how to prepare our annual reports to submit to the Regional Environmental Authority, and now we are also formulating projects. It is a wonderful experience and we are very grateful for CEPF's support," said Norvil Tantajulca, president of the campesino roundtable.

The workshops were organized by Peru's Profonanpe—which is part of the CEPF regional implementation team—with support from Asociación Amazónicas por la Amazonía. Also present were members of the National Advisory Committee on CEPF Proposals, the heads of the Cordillera de Colán National Sanctuary and the Chayu Nain Communal Reserve of the National Service of Natural Areas Protected by the State (SERNANP), the Regional Environmental Authority of the Amazon Region and the Regional Government of Cusco.

- The Bolivia national meeting of CEPF partners and allies also brought together 13 projects implemented in the Madidi - Pilón Lajas - Cotapata corridor on 4 September 2023. Organized by Asociación Boliviana para la Investigación y Conservación de Ecosistemas Andino-Amazonicos, part of CEPF's regional implementation team, the event allowed the various initiatives to present their progress and find synergies.

Activities included strengthening of productive, journalistic, financial, monitoring and information gathering capacities. Five of the implementing partners —Pastoral Cáritas Coroico, Prodena, Conservation Strategy Fund, Fundeco and Tsimané Moseten Regional Council—are working together with the inhabitants of local communities to support them to make informed decisions for the protection of their territories.

Other projects encourage local people to play the role of guardians and conservationists through ecotourism, such as those led by grantees Prometa, Codespa and Aves Bolivianas.

There are also four organizations implementing endangered species and nature conservation projects: Fundación Teko Kavi, Fundeco, WCS and Fundación Natura.

CARIBBEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

- Several palm and conifer species in the Dominican Republic, including Sierra de Bahoruco conifers and podocarp species, are facing extinction due to habitat loss caused by farming, fires, and unsustainable practices. Little is known about the status of these species. With support from the CEPF, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Conservation International (CI), along with the local NGO Grupo Jaragua, are collaborating to assess the status of these species and create a strategic roadmap for effective their management and preservation, integrating conservation efforts into the management plans of three protected areas.

Together with the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of the Dominican Republic, the partners convened two workshops between 19 and 27 September 2023 to develop a conservation action plan for the threatened conifers and palms and update their status on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and the Vascular Plant Red List of the Dominican Republic. More than 50 participants from national and international institutions with an interest in plant conservation in the Dominican Republic took part in the workshops. The first workshop focused on the assessment of trees for the IUCN Red List, evaluating the extinction risk of species based on rigorous criteria. The second workshop focussed on conservation planning for the endangered conifers and palms of the Jaragua-Bahoruco-Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve.

These workshops, which brought together both local and international scientific experts, as well as administrators and community authorities, not only aimed at assessment but also served as capacity-building exercises. Participants are now equipped to apply the Red Listing assessment process to other tree species, enhancing their ability to contribute to broader conservation efforts.

- With an area of just 1.6 square kilometres, the uninhabited island of Redonda may be small in size but is a giant in terms of biodiversity. Located southwest of Antigua and Barbuda,



this volcanic island provides nesting sites for thousands of seabird species and boasts several unique plants, some of which are endemic. Its steep cliffs offer a dramatic backdrop to the crystal-clear waters below, making Redonda a paradise for divers and snorkelers.

However, the island has faced numerous challenges and threats over the years. Invasive species, such as rats and feral goats, have wreaked havoc on the island's native flora and fauna, leading to habitat degradation and loss as well as soil erosion.

In a landmark decision, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda recently declared the entire island a protected area. One of the key factors that led to the declaration of Redonda as a protected area is its biodiversity, which includes several endemic species, such as the Critically Endangered Redonda ground dragon (*Pholidoscelis atratus*) and Redonda ameiva (*Pholidoscelis atratus*).

The declaration provides legal protection for Redonda's ecosystems, safeguarding them from habitat destruction, invasive species and illegal activities such as poaching and unregulated tourism. It also ensures that efforts to restore and protect Redonda can continue with greater support and resources.

Significantly, this decision is the product of a successful collaboration between local communities, conservation organizations, government agencies and international partners, including CEPF grantees the Environmental Awareness Group (EAG), based in Antigua, and Fauna & Flora—both of which played a critical and active role in the declaration.

EAG and Fauna & Flora were recipients of CEPF funding during the first Caribbean investment between 2010 and 2016 and both organizations are current grantees, implementing projects that will continue to strengthen biodiversity conservation in Antigua and Barbuda.

"I warmly congratulate the government and people of Antigua and Barbuda for designating the Redonda Ecosystem Reserve. This is also to the immense credit of our friends and partners at the Environmental Awareness Group, who have worked tirelessly to champion and restore Redonda and its wildlife, drawing on valuable training and support made possible by CEPF," said Jennifer Daltry, senior conservation biologist at Fauna & Flora.

"The EAG has, for the past few years, been building its capacity to manage protected areas and ensure that these areas become more than just paper parks,"

said Arica Hill, EAG's executive director. "We are pleased that our previous CEPF grant built technical capacity to remove and manage invasive species, which has become a benchmark for success across the many offshore islands that the EAG co-manages."

"That was a great starting point for us, and with the current funding received under our new CEPF grant, "Accelerating Conservation Action in Antigua and Barbuda," we have developed a sustainable finance unit that will not only help us to develop innovative ways to fund this protected area and others, but also reduce the reliance on project funding for some core costs and therefore continue to accelerate conservation action in Antigua and Barbuda," she added.

Photos (top to bottom): Little forktail (*Enicurus scouleri*), Kyrgyzstan. © Sergey Kulagin; Autumn in the Yagnob Valley, Tajikistan. © Marc Foggin; Sea cucumber cultivation. © YAPEKA; Pov Veuy fire brigade intervention to stop fire. © Conservation International; Donor and CEPF representatives, grantees and members of the regional implementation team visiting Bouhachem Nature Park, Morocco. © O. Langrand; Chantal Marijnissen, Olivier Langrand and Pierre Carret at the Mediterranean Photo Exhibit. © David Vanucci; Aldabra giant tortoise (*Aldabrachelys gigantea*), Curieuse Island, Seychelles. © IUCN NL; Military macaws (*Ara militaris*). © Michelle Léon/Pronaturaleza; Redonda. © EAG/Ed Marshall.