

Hotspot Highlights

Q2FY25

INDO-BURMA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT



Project Sets the Stage for Vietnamese Pond Turtle Recovery

A large grant to Indo-Myanmar Conservation (IMC) closed during the last quarter. The work supported by this grant significantly advanced the conservation of Vietnamese pond turtle (*Mauremys annamensis*), a Critically Endangered species that is recognized as one of the world's 25 most endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles. Because of its limited global range and high value in the illegal trade, this turtle has been trapped almost to the point of extinction. Although individuals have frequently been confiscated from wildlife traders, allowing a captive population to be built up, at the start of the IMC project there was no confirmed wild population.

Under the CEPF grant, IMC conducted interview and field surveys in south-central Vietnam in the hope of finding a suitable site where captive-bred animals could be released to reinforce or reestablish a wild population.

After receiving reports of the species within a protected area, the team collected water samples, which were tested for the presence of environmental DNA (eDNA). Several samples tested positive, confirming the presence of Vietnamese pond turtle from the wild for the first time. The site was found to have significant potential for restoration of a viable wild population of the species and is now the focus of species recovery efforts. Because the species breeds very well in captivity, there are now more than 1,000 individuals in rescue centers and captive breeding facilities in Vietnam, which can readily be used to raise large numbers for release. Plans are being developed with the protected area, relevant government agencies and rescue centers for a first release of Vietnamese pond turtles in 2025.

MEDITERRANEAN BASIN BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Ecosystem Profile Approval Kicks Off New Investment

The ecosystem profile update, setting the strategy for 2025-2030, was presented to the Working Group on 7 November 2024, and was revised based on comments received. The final profile was submitted to Donor Council on 8 November 2024 for approval and approved on 23 December 2024.

The CEPF Secretariat negotiated the new contract with BirdLife International for the role of regional implementation team. The contract was signed in January 2025. The team is in place and a strategy and planning meeting will take place in February 2025 in Cambridge, UK.

A new set of calls for proposals for the region will be issued by February 2025.

Meanwhile, Secretariat and RIT are closing the “interim” projects designed to bridge from the second phase of investment to the new third phase, particularly those funded under the partnership with DIMFE (the Donor Initiative for Mediterranean Freshwater Ecosystem), led by Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation.

Design Underway for GEF Small Grants Program in Libya

Libya is one of five countries where the GEF Small Grants Program is being implemented by Conservation International in collaboration with CEPF. Discussions are ongoing with Libyan GEF Focal Point to design the GEF Small Grant Program. A meeting in Tripoli is scheduled for April 2025.

MADAGASCAR AND THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Supervision Mission Focuses on Comoros

CEPF and the RIT conducted a supervision mission to Comoros from 3–14 October 2024.

The team met with small and large grant recipients on the islands of Grande Comore and Anjouan: ANYD (Association les Amis de Nyumbadjou-Djoumoichongo), IPAC (Initiative Pour une Alternative Citoyenne), BEE (Bureau d'Études Environnementales des Comores), Dahari, the focal point in Comoros of the Tropical Biology Association, and the upcoming large grant recipient, Dayima. The mission provided a valuable opportunity to engage more closely with grantees, observe their achievements and identify ways to strengthen collaboration among them and with key partners.



"The field visit broadened my perspective on our project," said Ibrahim Said, secretary general of IPAC. "Now it's up to us to maintain a dynamic approach to ensure its success. The biggest challenge is identifying shared goals for a specific area and community. Achieving this could strengthen solidarity and enhance our restoration efforts."

The mission also allowed the team to meet several partners, including the National Parks Agency, the National Designated Authority, the GEF focal point (who also serves as the director of Environment and Forests), the regional director of Environment from Anjouan, as well as regional representatives from AFD and the EU.

Association PARTAGE (PARTicipation A la Gestion de l'Environnement) was awarded a small grant in July 2023 to establish a pilot site for payment for ecosystem services (PES), encouraging small groups of self-governing farmers to engage in restoration and environmental management efforts. The overarching goal is to restore degraded land while reducing pressure on the Fandriana-Marolambo Forest Corridor. The PES model offers financial incentives for

farmers who plant trees and adopt sustainable agricultural practices.

In just over a year, 743 farmers—511 men and 232 women—have joined the program, forming 80 small groups. Together, they have planted over 11,200 trees, primarily within agroforestry systems. These trees will soon undergo an audit by the Iteraka platform, which partners with private donors to validate and fund each tree planted through the PES mechanism.

"Now seen as a precious resource, trees have become a sustainable solution for local communities after the seminar sessions organized by PARTAGE," said Project Coordinator Nicolas Andriamampianina. "They help restore degraded ecosystems and address local socioeconomic challenges. Farmers are actively involved in designing and shaping the PES program, which is created by them, for them."

Tree Conservation Projects Funded by Fondation Franklinia

Finally, under the Fondation Franklinia Program, CEPF has now committed approximately US\$800,000 with nine projects up and running (ranging from US\$20,000 to US\$170,000) for the protection of endangered tree species in Madagascar.

TROPICAL ANDES BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Conserving the Black-Breasted Puffleg and Engaging Local Communities



The black-breasted puffleg (*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*) is an Endangered hummingbird endemic to the Tropical Andes of Ecuador. With a global population estimated at less than 1,000 individuals, this species has suffered the loss and degradation of its original habitat. The mountain forests where it lives are under heavy pressure in three Key Biodiversity Areas: Mindo and the western foothills of Pichincha Volcano; Intag-Toisán; and Cotacachi Cayapas National Park. As a result, the project "Involving communities in the conservation of the Black-breasted Puffleg in Ecuador" led by Aves y Conservación and

BirdLife in Ecuador, seeks to protect this species through habitat restoration, capacity building, community outreach and environmental education.

In the Kinti Toisán reserve, local assistants were trained to conduct monthly censuses of the flowers used by the hummingbirds, recording up to 10 species of hummingbirds, including the black-breasted puffleg. In Mindo, the women's nursery group Raíces Nativas has planted more than 8,000 native plants, contributing to the restoration of key habitats. Censuses of the species were carried out in 18 localities in Pichincha and Imbabura by the Jocotoco Foundation, and 16 individual black-breasted pufflegs were counted—providing crucial information for guiding conservation actions.

Park rangers in Cotacachi Cayapas National Park have received training in bird monitoring techniques and native plant propagation and the use of technological tools such as ArcGIS, complementing their knowledge and strengthening the implementation of their monitoring and environmental education activities as part of the management plan of this important protected area. The environmental education component of the project is based on sharing information—mainly about birds—and plays a fundamental role in raising awareness, fostering respect for

nature and the importance of protected areas. More than 40 children participated in the “Friends of the Birds” program, and 63 students from the Abelardo Morán Muñoz Educational Unit in Piñán learned about the importance of birds and threat reduction.

In August, delegates from the German Embassy, KfW, the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition of Ecuador, CEPF and RIT Ecuador, represented by Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano (FFLA), visited the Raíces Nativas nursery in the community of Alambi, where they learned about the project's progress and activities, including the creation of an illustrated guide of 25 native plants.



The project has demonstrated how collaboration between communities, organizations and international donors can have a positive impact on the conservation of threatened species. With CEPF's support and the active participation of local communities, progress has been made in protecting the habitat of the black-breasted puffleg and in creating a culture of conservation that promises to endure over time, ensuring a more secure future for this species and for the biodiversity of the Ecuadorian Andes.

CARIBBEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Caribbean Islands Stakeholders Gathered for CEPF Midterm Assessment



With the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot Phase II investment at the halfway mark, a midterm assessment meeting was held from 19 to 21 November 2024 in the Dominican Republic. The meeting brought together more than 80 civil society grantees and partners from across the Caribbean region, along with representatives from The World Bank, the CEPF Secretariat and the RIT, Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI).

The event provided a platform for stakeholders to share progress, exchange ideas and strengthen collaboration to ensure the continued success of biodiversity conservation in the region. Meeting participants also offered valuable recommendations to help shape the remainder of CEPF's investment in the Caribbean (extended through mid-2027), emphasizing the importance of capacity strengthening, local involvement and regional networking to address shared challenges and enhance conservation efforts. Participants also offered suggestions for improving grant management processes and procedures.

As part of the meeting, participants visited Reserva Científica Ébano Verde and Parque Nacional Montaña La Humeadora, two CEPF priority Key Biodiversity Areas, where they were able to observe the on-the-ground impacts of CEPF-supported projects and interact with project stakeholders.

A video with highlights of the CEPF Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot Midterm Assessment Meeting is available here: <https://bit.ly/3WksVlf>

Photos (top to bottom): IMC and CEPF staff with captive-bred Vietnamese pond turtle (*Mauremys annamensis*). © Nguyen Duc Tu; Women members of the TERAKA Small Groups reading a brochure. © TERAKA; Black-breasted puffleg (*Eriocnemis nigrivestis*). © O. Langrand; Zuroloima Reserve, Ecuador © O. Langrand; Participants in the CEPF Caribbean Islands Midterm Assessment meeting. © Fondazione AVSI.

Hotspot Highlights

Q1FY25

MOUNTAINS OF CENTRAL ASIA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Raising Awareness of Biodiversity Through Photography

A core element of CEPF's work is the improved management of Key Biodiversity Areas or KBAs: sites that contribute significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity. KBAs include formal protected areas (e.g., parks, nature reserves, wildlife reserves) but also production land and seascape, such as farms, production forests, grazing areas and fishing grounds, where people make a living. In fact, huge amounts of biodiversity can be found outside of protected areas, and conservation can occur side-by-side with people using the land and sea. Thus, the concept of KBAs can become one of awareness, letting people know that where they live and work is a place of global significance.



In Kyrgyzstan, scientists have identified 32 KBAs. However, the typical Kyrgyz citizen or government official might only know about the country's protected areas. A person might know about a national park, which could be important for snow leopard or wild relatives of fruit trees, but not realize that the actual important habitat extends beyond the park's boundaries into a broader KBA. The Union of Photojournalists set about rectifying this by documenting, mapping and publicizing information about the country's 32 KBAs, because how can you get people to support conservation of a place if they cannot see it or do not know where it is?

The Union of Photojournalists created a website, www.map.kg, with stunning, professional photos of each of the country's KBAs. This work does not just raise awareness but also drives tourism and investment into conservation work. For example, based on the grantee's work, villagers near the [Aflatun-Padysha-Ata](#) KBA developed yurt camps and a trail system for visitors. The villagers formed links with private tour operators who can now explain to potential visitors why this place is unique.

WALLACEA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Improving Management of Marine Protected Areas in the Maluku Islands

CEPF support to the Coral Triangle Center Foundation (CTC) and its partner, the Baileo Foundation, to work with communities on a small group of islands (Haruku, Saparua and Nusa Laut) in the province of Maluku, has recently come to an end. The seascape around these

islands holds a large area of intact seagrass beds, which form a home for dugong (*Dugong*



dugon), a docile marine mammal that is vulnerable to extinction. There is a formal marine protected area within the waters sheltered by these islands. CTC's work started with science: identifying the eight seagrass species on which dugong feed; determining the 22 feeding trails used by the animals; and monitoring the animals themselves.

CTC established a monitoring system for fishers to report sightings and then raised awareness in the communities

about how healthy seagrass habitat relates to a productive fishery. CTC used posters, banners, information sheets, school events and beach clean-up days to reach over 3,300 people on the islands. As a side benefit, the beach clean-up then received additional cash support from the local waste company, PT Milion Ambon. The grantee also facilitated the drafting of regulations on waste management and care around seagrass beds in the villages of Mahu, Booi and Ihamahu. In those three villages, plus the villages of Porto and Paperu, CTC and Baileo also helped establish customary surveillance groups to work with formal authorities to ensure no illegal activities took place inside the marine protected area.

Ultimately, CTC's work helped improve the management of 67,484 hectares of marine protected area, as measured by the Government of Indonesia's formal scoring system. Vigilance and care must be maintained, however, as warming waters due to climate change promote algae growth, making the area that much more sensitive to human disturbance.

INDO-BURMA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Turtle Conservation in Myanmar

During the last quarter, CEPF grantee Turtle Survival Alliance completed a project on turtle conservation in Myanmar. The project overcame very challenging operating conditions, following the military takeover in February 2021, to advance the conservation of two Critically Endangered turtle species. For Burmese star tortoise (*Geochelone platynota*), the project continued reintroduction efforts at Minzontaung and Shwesettaw Wildlife Sanctuaries. Through egg translocations and (at the former site) release of more than 1,000 tortoises, reintroduced wild populations were reinforced.

There are now more than 5,000 free-ranging tortoises at the two sanctuaries, with evidence of reproduction at both. For Burmese roofed turtle (*Batagur trivittata*), 100 head-started turtles were released into the upper Chindwin River, further reinforcing the wild population (the last in the world), which is recovering from a very low level. The number of assurance colonies of the species producing eggs and hatchlings has increased to three, further mitigating the risk of biological extinction of the species.



As well as impacts on the wild and captive populations of the two species, the project strengthened capacity in turtle conservation at individual and organizational levels. More than 110 people were engaged in turtle conservation efforts, whether as local staff, hired labor, community conservation volunteers or suppliers of food for the assurance populations. Of particular note are the six community conservation volunteers who completed a training program in turtle conservation and emerged as "Turtle Champions." Finally, a local turtle conservation organization, called WeCan, was established. By the end of the project, WeCan had five staff members and was involved in the implementation of several turtle conservation projects.

MEDITERRANEAN BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Uncovering Bosnia and Herzegovina's Hidden Fungi

Fungi have long been an under-researched aspect of biodiversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). In response, the Mycological Society (MycoBH), a CEPF grantee in BiH, undertook an ambitious project to classify and assess local fungi while adhering to IUCN standards. The team strategically focused on select locations and employed innovative methods, including the *in vivo* live taxonomy approach, which allowed the team to study fungi while alive and preserve their tissues for further examination. This method revealed complex ecological interactions and responses to environmental changes.



Over 18 months, the team documented 241 fungi species, including significant finds such as *Hymenoscyphus laetus*, a Mediterranean aquatic species previously unknown on the mainland, and *Kompsoscypha chudei*, a tropical species from Madagascar. These discoveries enriched the understanding of the region's biodiversity. MycoBH has recently released the findings of its research in a comprehensive [publication](#), emphasizing the need for ongoing exploration and protection of these vital organisms.

The Royal Irises of Palestine

Palestine has a rich flora diversity due to its diverse biogeographical zones and different topographical features. Among its unique flora, the royal irises comprise 33 species endemic to the Middle East, with three documented species in the West Bank. However, comprehensive studies on their distribution, population size and conservation status have been lacking.

Despite the immense challenges in the Middle East, Nature Palestine Society, a CEPF grantee in Palestine, has conducted a [research study](#) to evaluate the occurrence, distribution, population size, habitat, and inflorescence coloration of the Vulnerable and endemic *Iris haynei*, the Endangered *I. lortetii*, and the Vulnerable *I. atrofusca*, revealing previously unreported populations and unique color variations. The research documented newly identified distribution



sites and a stunning variety of flower colors, with over 25,000 flowers recorded across the West Bank. These findings underline the urgency of conservation efforts to protect these unique and beautiful plants.

MADAGASCAR AND THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Information Sessions on Gender and Ecosystem-Based Adaptation

In July, one information session led by the CEPF Secretariat and the regional implementation team (RIT) explored with regional civil society organizations how to effectively integrate a gender perspective into ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) projects in the hotspot. Discussions and practical case studies from Conservation International Madagascar, the Aspinall Foundation, and Ny Tanintsika (the latter two being CEPF grantees) showed how they ensure that marginalized groups, particularly women, play a meaningful role in decision-making and participation in their projects. The session allowed the 29 attendees to deepen their understanding of gender-responsive approaches in EbA projects. It followed a previous session held in April that presented a comprehensive planning and implementation model developed by GIZ (German Development Cooperation) and IISD (International Institute for Sustainable Development). The recording of the second session is available [here](#).

Eradicating Invasive Alien Rats from Curieuse Island, Seychelles



In September, SeyCCAT, the RIT organization in the Seychelles, carried out a site visit to Indian Ocean Tortoise Alliance (IOTA), a large-grant recipient. In partnership with Seychelles Parks and Gardens Authority and Terrestrial Restoration Action Society of Seychelles, IOTA is eradicating rats from Curieuse Island, the fifth largest inner granitic island in Seychelles. The island hosts over 320 native taxa, including 87 endemic to Seychelles and some endemic only to Curieuse. Rats are currently being eradicated using an innovative strategy with Goodnature A24 self-resetting and non-toxic traps, which instantaneously kills rats and can continue operating for months with almost no

maintenance. The project is scheduled to run over two years and includes improving biosecurity measures on the island, as well as public education. The project is well underway with 54% of the planned traps already deployed on about half of the project area (286 hectares). Two conservation dogs have been meticulously trained to detect rats on the island along with camera traps monitoring rat activities. In October, IOTA will host 10 trips of 15 students to raise awareness of the impact of invasive alien species on the island ecosystems. While monitoring the project's progress, the site visit also provided insight into the challenges of implementing such a large-scale, non-toxic rat eradication project. See the video [here](#).

TROPICAL ANDES BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

CEPF and Tropical Andes Grantees Attend COP16



As delegates from around the world traveled to Cali, Colombia, for the 16th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity, staff from CEPF and partners gathered to share updates on their conservation efforts, forge new partnerships and develop plans for the future.

At the official negotiation venue, known as the Blue Zone, CEPF and partners participated in a series of side events related to achieving the targets established in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. CEPF Executive Director Olivier Langrand served as a panelist at a side event on fund mobilization for the Mediterranean Basin Hotspot.

In the Green Zone, dedicated to events sponsored by civil society, Tropical Andes Grant Director Michele Zador and RIT Country Coordinator Martha Silva of Patrimonio Natural participated in a series of seminars, exhibits and meetings sponsored by Colombian grantees Corporación para la Gestión Ambiental Biodiversa (Biodiversa), Corporación Ambiental y Forestal del Pacífico (Corpopal), Fundación Calima, Corporación Serraniagua, Fundación Con Vida, Fundación Ecológica Fenicia Defensa Natural (FEDENA), Fundación Ecovivero and Fundación Ecológica los Colibries (FELCA).

The meetings were revealing. Representatives from local communities and environmental NGOs benefitting directly from CEPF grants proudly described how they are working through alliances with local governments to protect biodiversity. They revealed how, after many years of habitat protection and restoration, they are seeing exciting results. For instance, spectacled bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*), puma (*Puma concolor*) and other wildlife species that had not been seen

for years are returning to areas that were once highly degraded. Local herpetologists were thrilled to report that populations of some elusive, threatened amphibians are, surprisingly, on the upswing.

While CEPF and partners spent much of the week sharing news about their projects, it was hard to miss the high-spirited celebration of COP-16 and biodiversity conservation by people from around the world at Cali. The city was abuzz with a kaleidoscope of seminars, exhibits, fairs, concerts, dancing and art exhibits in celebration of nature in all its forms. The aspirations of thousands of delegates from around the globe at Cali underscored the imperative to reach agreement on ambitious commitments to address the biodiversity crisis.

CARIBBEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Strengthening Conservation Partnerships in the Dominican Republic: New Co-Management Agreement for Padre Miguel Domingo Fuertes Natural Monument



In August 2024, the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources in the Dominican Republic took an important step towards strengthening governance of the Padre Miguel Domingo Fuertes Natural Monument (Bahoruco Oriental) by signing a co-management agreement with civil society organizations and academic institutions active in the KBA. Among the signatories were two current CEPF grantees—Fundación de Apoyo al Suroeste (FUNDASUR) and Sociedad Ornitológica de la Hispaniola (SOH Conservación)—whose projects are instrumental in strengthening site management.

FUNDASUR is updating the management plan for the protected area and is responsible for drafting the first annual operational plan, which will be implemented once the management plan has been approved by environmental authorities. SOH Conservación is focused on improving practices in Bahoruco Oriental KBA by developing and implementing conservation action plans for five key species, including Hispaniolan solenodon (*Solenodon paradoxus*), Bicknell's thrush (*Catharus bicknelli*), bay-breasted cuckoo (*Coccyzus ruficularis*) and red-legged robber frog (*Eleutherodactylus rufifemoralis*). Additionally, the grantees are creating a business plan to enhance ecotourism services in the area.

The signatories to the agreement form a co-management council, which will oversee conservation efforts, implement management strategies and foster community engagement. In addition to FUNDASUR and SOH Conservación, Council members include Sociedad Ornitológica Sociedad Ecológica de Paraíso (SOEPA) and Fundación Universitaria Católica Tecnológica de Barahona (FUCATEBA).

With an area of 2,964 hectares, the Padre Miguel Domingo Fuertes Natural Monument is one of the KBAs in the Dominican Republic prioritized under the current CEPF investment in the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot. This KBA is distinguished by its diverse landscapes, including Hispaniola's only *Magnolia hamori* forest. It supports 26 of the 34 restricted-range bird species on the island, such as the Endangered white-fronted quail-dove (*Geotrygon leucometopia*) and the Endangered Hispaniolan amazon (*Amazona ventralis*), along with a variety of globally threatened amphibians, endemic reptiles and rare orchids. Protecting this area is

crucial for preserving its unique biodiversity.

This co-management agreement marks the eighth such agreement signed in the Dominican Republic in 2024, reflecting a growing commitment to participatory governance and collaborative conservation efforts in that country.

Photos (top to bottom): Aflatun-Padysha-Ata KBA, Kyrgyzstan. © Union of Photojournalists; A dugong is seen in the waters of Likuang, Tabukan Utara Sub-district, Sangihe Islands District, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. © YAPEKA; *Batagur trivittata* on the upper Chindwin River Photo. © Kyaw Zaw Aung; *Hymenoscypus laetus*. © Nedim Jukic, MycoBH; *Iris atrofusca* in Tubas, Palestine. © Anton Khalilieh, NPS; Anse Badamier viewpoint on Curieuse Island. © Peggy Poncelet; Members of CEPF and Tropical Andes grantees in Cali, Colombia for COP-16. © Biodiversa Colombia; Bahoruco Oriental management plan workshop. © FUNDASUR.