

MOUNTAINS OF CENTRAL ASIA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

CEPF promotes the use of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) to focus the work of grantees on the most important geographies for conservation. Scientists in Kyrgyzstan have identified 32 such geographies in their country. The challenge in Kyrgyzstan is that while conservation managers within the country's environment ministry support the use of KBAs, the broader population and political leaders do not necessarily understand what these are. People know about the country's iconic species and its national parks and other protected area—they can identify them, point to them on a map, explain their purpose—but for them, a KBA is a fuzzier concept. KBAs often include unprotected land abutting a protected area, or a KBA might consist entirely of unprotected land. KBA names themselves might refer to broader geographies that Kyrgyz people do not associate with conservation.

In response, the Bishkek-based Union of Photojournalists is working to change national public awareness about the Kyrgyz KBAs. The group has taken stunning photos of each of the KBAs, put them on an interactive website, map.kg that provides further information about each location, and is promoting responsible tourism to selected locations. The idea is that people will support conservation in their country if they can see, and take pride, in the stunning geography that is their national heritage.



WALLACEA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT



In Wallacea, many grants are made to local nongovernmental organizations helping local communities to improve the management of their fisheries—often tuna, mackerel or octopus—while also protecting globally important coral reefs. Often, the organizations are experts at issues of protected area delineation and establishment, community engagement and livelihood promotion. However, they are not necessarily experts at fishery management, which can involve knowledge of catch-per-unit-effort studies, training in use of nondestructive fishing gear, vessel licensing, health insurance for fishers, post-catch handling methods and engagement of buyers willing to pay a premium for a sustainable catch.

Thus, CEPF has made a grant to MDPI, a Bali-based group that specializes in training smaller Indonesian organizations and community-based groups in fishery management. Through May and June 2023, MDPI conducted training sessions for 12 other CEPF grantees on small-scale fishery management, fishery co-management committee governance and financial literacy. The groups can now put their training into practice, with MDPI providing further on-site mentoring.

INDO-BURMA BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

The quarter saw the close of a grant to Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT), which used policy dialogues and public forums to amplify the voices of local communities and nongovernmental organizations to advocate for better fisheries resources management. FACT strengthened the capacity of three nationwide coalitions: the NGO Coalition on Fisheries, the Coalition of Cambodia Fishers, and the Cambodia Fisheries Network. By the end of the grant, each coalition had a five-year strategic plan approved by the government, and the number of active members had increased.



Through the grant, FACT improved documentation and dissemination of lessons learned, case studies and success stories from network members, which enabled experience from the CEPF portfolio to influence policy. Most notably, FACT organized a national public forum on “Strengthening Good Governance and Effectiveness in Fisheries Resources Management,” which brought together actors involved in community fisheries management from across

Cambodia. A key outcome was an agreement between FACT and the Ministry of the Interior to allocate 10% of the budget of 15 pilot communes to support community-led fisheries conservation. This is a major step toward ensuring financial sustainability for community-based fisheries management in Cambodia, which currently is dependent on grant funding from international donors.

CARIBBEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Antigua and St. Lucia



The CEPF Phase II Caribbean Islands investment is making an important contribution to the conservation of globally threatened species in the hotspot. One project that is making inroads is a regionwide initiative by re:wild to support local stakeholders to prepare conservation action plans for nine Caribbean endemic plants and animals, all assessed as Critically Endangered and Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Together with its partner organizations—the Environmental Awareness Group (EAG) and Fauna and Flora—re:wild has kicked off its work in the region with conservation action

planning workshops in Antigua and Saint Lucia focusing on the Antiguan racer (*Alsophis antiguae*) and Saint Lucia fer de lance (*Bothrops caribbaeus*) respectively, and involving local experts and stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations and businesses.

These workshops are an opportunity for stakeholders to review and discuss the findings of target-species reports developed by re:wild and become familiar with new materials for designing species conservation action plans, including a format for monitoring the status of each species, its threats and management actions.

The workshop on the Antiguan Racer took place in early May 2023 and brought together 18 participants, of which 11 were women and seven were men. The action planning workshop for the Saint Lucia fer de lance was held in late June and was attended by 24 local stakeholders, of which 13 participants were women. Key experts who could not attend the workshops in Antigua and Saint Lucia were consulted independently to provide inputs to the species action plans currently being developed.

Re:wild has been holding virtual and in-person sessions to prepare upcoming conservation action planning workshops for three additional priority species, namely The Bahamas' San Salvador rock iguana (*Cyclura rileyi*), the Saint Vincent frog (*Pristimantis shrevei*), and the Jamaican blackbird (*Nesopsar nigerrimus*).

Re:wild and its partners expect to complete five conservation action plans in 2023 and all nine by October 2024. Re:wild will then provide technical support and supervision to local organizations to implement the action plans.

Dominican Republic

The link between biodiversity conservation and livelihoods is especially strong in the small island developing states of the Caribbean, where there is a high level of direct dependence on natural resources. An important element of CEPF's Caribbean strategy is supporting work by groups such as Fondazione AVSI in the Dominican Republic to mitigate and reduce threats to Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) while promoting alternative



sustainable livelihoods. Fondazione AVSI's efforts are in the transition and buffer zone of the Sierra de Bahoruco National Park, where it promotes beekeeping for family incomes and the conservation of flora species, which is essential for beekeeping and for maintaining the forest cover.

Beekeeping training is currently underway with more than 40 beekeepers from the APISINE group and the Cooperativa Agropecuaria y Servicios Múltiples de Productores de Puerto Escondido (COOPROASPE), who are being trained in the proper management of apiaries and other beekeeping activities. Training sessions are being held monthly and will continue until the project ends in February 2024. These sessions consider the region's particularities, prioritize topics of interest to the participants, and intentionally set out to include women.

The beekeeping training is complemented by actions to strengthen the conservation of Sierra de Bahoruco National Park through the reforestation of 10 hectares of native tree species with high value for beekeeping to trigger a "payments for ecosystems services" scheme that will benefit local communities.

In addition, AVSI has embarked on a public training and awareness-raising campaign primarily targeting youth and focused on disseminating information about environmental and bioecological issues relevant to the region, including identifying endemic species. This campaign has reached close to 300 people through community meetings and radio programs.

TROPICAL ANDES BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT

Bolivia

A CEPF-funded analysis of hair samples collected in 36 Indigenous communities revealed worrisome results within Bolivia's Madidi-Pilón Lajas-Cotapata conservation corridor, where illegal gold mining has grown explosively in recent years. More than 75% of the samples taken exceeded the World Health Organization's maximum threshold for mercury at 1 part per million (ppm). The average mercury concentration of the samples was 3.93 ppm, with the highest being 17.52 ppm.



The analysis was conducted as part of a project led by Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in Bolivia, working within a consortium with three other Bolivian groups dedicated to mitigating the impacts of uncontrolled illegal gold mining in the hotspot, particularly with respect to the impacts on human and environmental health, as well

as biodiversity. WCS worked closely with the Tsimane-Mosetene Indigenous Authority (CRTM), a longstanding CEPF partners that has co-management responsibilities for the Pilon Lajas Biosphere Reserve, and whose communities have been severely impacted by mercury contamination.

Using the findings, the Central De Pueblos Indígena De La Paz (CPILAP), which represents the Indigenous peoples of the Department of La Paz, launched a very successful outreach campaign during the reporting period to call attention to the problem of illegal gold mining, especially along the river network that Indigenous communities depend on for their sustenance. CPILAP called on local and national government authorities to take action to stop the illegal activities.

Since the launch of the public education campaign, CEPF's partners have continued to work diligently and have achieved significant breakthroughs. For the first time ever, the municipality of Rurrenabaque, which has jurisdiction over the lower watershed of many rivers where the illegal mining is taking place, ordered all those conducting illegal mining to halt their activities. Recently, a judge ordered the installation of control posts to allow the Bolivian police and armed forces to patrol the waterways at risk.

The campaign even reached national audiences and has led to proposals by national authorities to reform the country's outdated mining laws, including controls on the importation of mercury to Bolivia. A major conference is now scheduled in September to focus on how to deal with the widespread pollution caused by gold mining in the Bolivian portion of the hotspot.

Colombia

In Colombia, Patrimonio Natural in its capacity as the Colombian RIT organized a successful gathering of CEPF grantees and stakeholders in Cali from 3–4 May. Sixty-one participants gathered from throughout the western Andean cordillera of Colombia. They represented local community groups and their associations, environmental organizations, universities, Indigenous groups, and local and regional governments. They aimed to identify opportunities for collaboration and share experiences in implementing their conservation projects. Topics included



local governance, strengthening public policies, fostering green businesses, building climate resilience, creating and managing protected areas and conserving species conservation. Participants also visited three CEPF-funded project sites in the San Antonio Forest/KM 18 Key Biodiversity Area near Cali.

According to CEPF Colombia Country Coordinator Martha Silva, "CEPF's presence in Colombia has been critically important in terms of building an alliance of local conservation actors to come together periodically and to work synergistically toward strengthening their technical capacities and collaborating in areas of common interest. This gathering played an important role in fostering this collaborative approach, not only to benefit CEPF projects, but also to achieve synergies across other conservation efforts in the hotspot."

MADAGASCAR AND THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOT



On 11 May, as part of the celebration of the European Week, a one-day exhibition on EU-funded projects was held in Analakely, Antananarivo, Madagascar. SAF-FJKM, through its participation in the implementation of the "Ecosystem-based Adaptation in the Indian Ocean" (EBAIO) program as part of the Regional Implementation Team, was one of the exhibitors invited by the EU delegation. It was an opportunity to interact with a diverse range of visitors: representatives from businesses and nongovernmental organizations, students and other

citizens who were interested to learn more about the grant program focusing on ecosystem-based adaption (EbA) and conservation in the Madagascar and the Indian Ocean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot.

A new call for letters of inquiry for large grants in Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius and the Seychelles also opened on 6 June with a deadline 1 August. The call is for projects focusing on Strategic Direction 3 which is about strengthening the technical, administrative and financial capacities of local civil society organizations' capacity and promoting exchanges and partnerships (at the national and regional levels) among organizations working in priority KBAs. Other eligible projects for this call are those focusing on Investment Priority 4.1 to support applied research activities that improve understanding of the role of specific ecosystems and test the effectiveness of promising EbA techniques.

Photos (top to bottom): Eastern Issyk-Kul Key Biodiversity Area, Kyrgyzstan. © Union of Photojournalists; MDPI fisheries training. © MDPI; Adult female Antigua Racer (*Alsophis antiguae*). © Jenny Daltry / re:wild & Fauna and Flora; AVSI beekeeping training. © Valentin Cuevas; Collecting hair samples for mercury contamination testing. © WCS; Meeting of Nacional de Socios de Colombia. © Biodiversa Colombia; Welcoming visitors, Analakely, Antananarivo, Madagascar. © SAF/FJKM