

## LETTER FROM AFRICA

ELIZABETH L. BENNETT



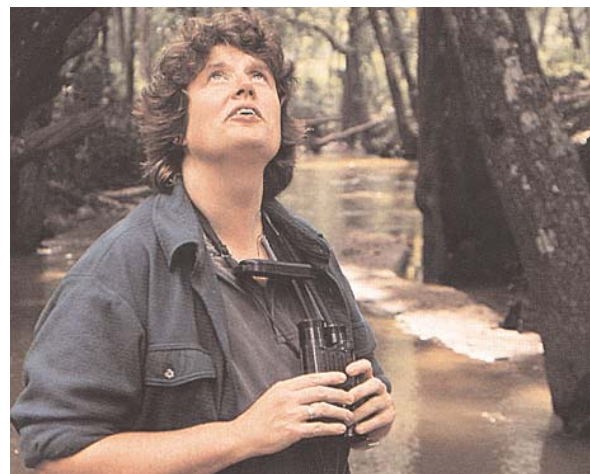
ELIZABETH BENNETT; TOM VETRE (FAR RIGHT); NOVA DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (BOTTOM 2)

### Dear WCS Member,

It was difficult even to identify what animal this had been. The smoke-dried, shrivelled carcass, displayed on a pointed stake beside the muddy road, could have been any sort of monkey or small antelope. It was there to attract buyers—a sign of the vast and expanding market for wild meat or “bushmeat” throughout central Africa. We were in Cameroon, driving and occasionally pushing the Land Cruiser out of the potholes and mud on one of the country’s main roads. Every couple of miles, we saw more barely identifiable animals or bits of animals on these stakes beside the road. By contrast, in the nearby forest, we didn’t see any large animals at all. We heard small birds, but the forest was eerily devoid of larger creatures, and the telltale signs of shotgun cartridges beside the trails told us why. The animals from the forest were being shot or snared and then taken for the hunters’ own consumption or put up for sale along nearby roads. Others were transported along major trading routes on bush taxis or trains to large towns and cities where bushmeat is a prized commodity and fetches high prices.

The problem has escalated out of control in recent years because the forests are being opened up. Development programs and, much worse, the spread of roads into the forests in the rush to extract timber and other resources means that hunters can drive into the heart of the forest and wildlife can be driven out to markets along these same roads.

I knew all about this from what I’d read. But this was my first time in the Congo



Basin, seeing it for myself. Initially, I was pleasantly surprised—logging rates were much lower than in Southeast Asia where I’d worked for the past 20 years. Here in central Africa, the loggers were taking out only the few rarest and most valuable trees. That and the much flatter terrain meant that damage to the remaining forest was much less than what I was used to seeing, and the huge scars of bare earth were much less common. But in other ways, the story was depressingly the same—the hunting that came in with the logging was wiping out the wildlife. Anything from elephants, gorillas, and chimps to porcupines and hornbills were ending up in the cooking pot. I felt that I was seeing the end of the wildlife of one of the world’s last wild places, the vast rain forests of the Congo Basin.

There are seeds of hope, however. Conservation projects in a few protected areas and logging concessions are working. Wildlife in those few jewels is still abundant. These projects involve extremely dedicated people working for decades to save the individual areas they love. But as I got on the plane to come home, I realized that we have to expand those programs rapidly if the spectacular wildlife of Africa’s great rain forests is to stand any chance of survival rather than ending up dried and covered in flies beside the road.

**Elizabeth L. Bennett, WCS Senior Conservation Zoologist (pictured above), saw firsthand the devastating effects of the bushmeat trade on wildlife in Cameroon. Any animal that can be eaten is caught by hunters who travel ever deeper into the forests. Even chimpanzees and elephants (left) can end up at roadside markets like the animals pictured here (upper left).**



# LETTER FROM RUSSIA

JOHN GOODRICH



JOHN GOODRICH (4)



## Dear WCS Member,

After spending two weeks at my computer writing year-end reports, I was going stir-crazy and needed to get out into the woods. I decided to track Valodia, a young, but large, male tiger we'd captured last spring. His radio signal indicated he had spent the past few days in one of my favorite spots on the reserve and I suspected that he had been on a kill. I threw on my pack with its 40 pounds of field gear, strapped on a pair of showshoes for wading through knee-deep snow, and set off along the coast of Blogadatna. The weather was hazy and a balmy 25 degrees Fahrenheit, unseasonably warm. About a mile down the coast I looked up and was startled to see a young seal lying on the shore watching me with frightened eyes. I approached to within a few yards, shot several photos of this beautiful light gray animal with huge brown eyes, and then moved off a few yards. Seeing his chance, he darted into the sea. Seals are common here, but I'd never seen one so close.

I cut inland, up and over the pass to Hauntami. The going was tough, with deep, soft snow and heavy brush. By the time I made it to the top, I was panting and drenched in sweat. Just over the top, two young elk trotted towards me and then, realizing I wasn't another elk, dashed off, barking. As I started down the other side, a red fox darted across the trail. In seven years here, I've probably seen only a half-dozen foxes. I followed his tracks down a steep gully to the coast and, stepping around a rock outcropping, found myself face to face with a huge sika deer buck just five yards away. He jumped up,



spinning 180 degrees in midair, and crashed off through the brush. As I watched him move up the hillside, I noticed a Steller's sea eagle coasting in to land on a nearby cliff. As he set down, he spooked three ghorals (wild goats), a very rare species in this neck of the woods. Realizing the sun was getting low, I turned and continued on my trek.

Valodia's kill, which was deep within a nearly impenetrable oak thicket, took a lot longer to find than I'd originally thought. But just as the sun dropped below the horizon, I spotted it under a stunted larch tree. What was left of the yearling elk—a pile of hair, a few leg bones, and tracks in the snow—told the story of his demise. Valodia must have been bedded under the stunted larch tree, scavenging the remains of an elk he had killed a few weeks before, when the yearling elk blundered into him. With five quick bounds through brush I could barely walk through, Valodia covered the ten yards to the elk and killed it with a swift bite to the neck before dragging it back to his bed. After taking notes, I collected all my samples and began the six-mile hike out. I arrived at my truck well after dark, exhausted but smiling. It had been a good day.

**John Goodrich, WCS Associate Conservationist, reports on the variety of wildlife he recently observed while tracking the tiger Valodia (pictured here with John, on the right, and named after Valodia Sulamaten, on the left, a park guard for 30 years). Unusually warm weather brought out a seal along the rocky shores (left) and produced distinctive tiger tracks in the snow (above).**

# UPDATE

## STEEPLE JASON AND GRAND JASON ISLANDS

The Wildlife Conservation Society recently announced ownership of two spectacular, uninhabited islands in the south Atlantic, home to huge numbers of penguins, albatrosses, and other rare wildlife. The islands, part of the Falklands archipelago, were donated by New York philanthropist Michael Steinhardt, a member of the WCS Board of Trustees. "At a time when wild places supporting great gatherings of animals are fewer and fewer, it is uncommon to be given a landscape of this importance and biological integrity to protect," said Dr. Steven Sanderson, president and CEO of the Wildlife Conservation Society. "It is even more uncommon to find the individual who has the vision and understanding to appreciate all that can be learned at such a place."

Called Steeple Jason and Grand Jason, the islands lie about 250 miles east of Argentina on the edge of the continental shelf. They support not only large populations of penguins (rockhopper, gentoo, Magellanic) and black-browed albatrosses, but also Southern giant petrels, Falklands skuas, and one of the world's rarest birds of prey, the "johnny rook" (a.k.a. striated caracara). The Jasons are among the westernmost islands in the Falklands chain. Steeple Jason's nesting population of more than 150,000 pairs of black-browed albatrosses is considered the largest in the world. "The list of the places on Earth

that hold truly major populations of wild animals is alarmingly short," Mr. Steinhardt said while discussing his gift. "The Jason Islands are on that list and I want to ensure they remain on it forever."

Working in conjunction with the Falkland Islands' government and Falklands Conservation, a local environmental organization, WCS plans to construct a research station on one of the islands to gain a better understanding of the native animal species, many of which have declined over the past century. Mr. Steinhardt will give WCS \$425,000 to build the research station and underwrite three years of research programs.

According to WCS Senior Conservationist Dr. William Conway, who recently returned from wildlife surveys of the two Jasons, their vast bird colonies represent one of the great wildlife spectacles left on Earth, comparable to the wildebeest migration of the Serengeti and to the caribou migration of the Arctic. "The Falkland Islands have some of the last great masses of birds and the Jasons' colonies are particularly spectacular," he said. "It's truly awe-inspiring. It is

DR. WILLIAM CONWAY



the sort of thing that makes one feel small."

But the islands are more than just two isolated jewels. Long-term WCS research in neighboring Patagonia, Argentina, shows that the Jason Islands are part of a much larger, dynamic ecosystem, vital to everything from elephant seals to penguins. "The Jason Islands are one piece of an ecosystem-wide puzzle that the Wildlife Conservation Society has been working on since the 1960s," said Dr. Andrew Taber, WCS's director for the Latin America Program. "The gift of the islands allows us to establish another conservation beachhead to further understand the natural systems that impact wildlife of the region."

DENNIS DEWELLO/WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY



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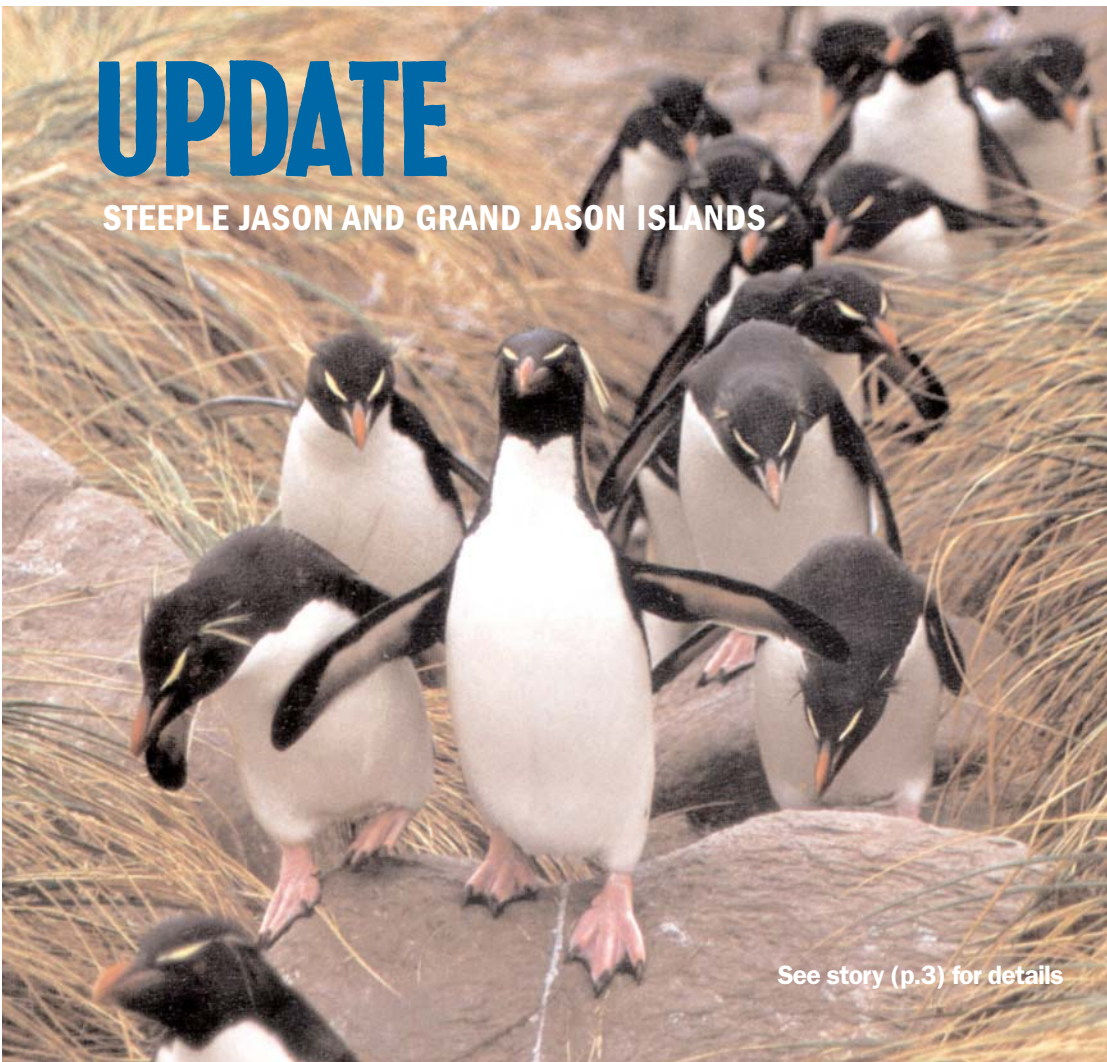


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# UPDATE

STEEPLE JASON AND GRAND JASON ISLANDS



See story (p.3) for details

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

SPRING/SUMMER 2002

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#### **TO CONTACT THE MEMBERSHIP OFFICE**

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