

Biodiversity taking a beating

Erosion of natural world over last 40 years 'shocking'

MARGARET MUNRO
Canwest News Service

World leaders have broken their promise to slow the rate of biodiversity loss across the planet, say scientists tracking everything from vanishing languages to shrinking forests.

Animal populations are down 31 per cent since 1970, shorebird populations have dropped 52 per cent, while forests have shrunk three per cent, mangroves by 19 per cent, and seagrass beds by 20 per cent, says an international team that lays out the gloomy situation in a report to be published Friday in the journal *Science*.

The team points to "a few encouraging achievements" but says international leaders' eight-year-old commitment to slow biodiversity loss by 2010 has not been met and pressures facing Earth's biodiversity continue to mount.

Human consumption of the planet's ecological assets is still rising — and is up a whopping 78 per cent since 1970. World fisheries are in more trouble than ever with "79 per cent of fish stocks over-exploited, fully exploited, or depleted," says lead author Stuart Butchart, a British scientist with the UN Environment Program World Conservation Monitoring Centre.

The situation is not much better for birds, he says, with North American grassland and arid land bird populations down by almost 30 per cent.

"It is shocking," Butchart, says of the erosion of the natural world that has continued since world leaders signed the 2002 Convention on Biological Diversity to slow biodiversity loss.

"Government leaders made this commitment in recognition that we are destroying nature across the planet and our synthesis provides overwhelming evidence that they failed to deliver on those commitments," Butchart said in an interview Thursday.

He says there is both a moral and economic imperative to better protect the planet.

"It's important not just because all nature has intrinsic value — and what right have we got to destroy it, or prevent future generations from having the opportunity to benefit and appreciate it," says Butchart, "but also because we obtain huge economic benefits from biodiversity, clean drinking water, pollination of our crops, healthy soils."

The report includes data from conservation bodies around the world that track bird and animal populations, fish stocks, coral reefs, rainforests, and even the number of human languages.

Twenty-two per cent of the 6,900 languages are spoken by fewer than 1,000 people and "are in danger of disappearing within this century," the report says.

There are a few positive trends: Waterfowl populations in North America and Europe are up 44 per cent since 1980 due to wetland protection and more sustainable management; the water quality in Asia has improved 7.4 per cent since 1970, and there are now about 133,000 protected areas covering 12 per cent of the planet's land mass.

There has also been plenty of talk about tackling biodiversity loss, with 87 per cent of countries having devised national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

"But an 'action plan' is not action," says co-author Daniel Pauly, a fisheries specialist of the University of British Columbia, stressing the needs for a lot more concrete change.

Less than one per of the world's oceans are in marine protected areas — a tiny fraction of the 20 to 30 per cent of the oceans that need protection if fisheries stocks are ever to rebuild, says Pauly.

While the number of parks on land has increased, many of them are small, not strategically located to protect biodiversity, or lack proper protection. "Paper parks," says Pauly.

The report, to be presented at the May meeting on the biodiversity convention, calls for governments to reverse detrimental policies, integrate biodiversity into land-use decisions, and boost funding for policies that tackle biodiversity loss head-on.

"We are rapidly destroying the natural capital on which we depend," says Butchart.



Human Consumption 90%



Shore birds 52%



Animals 31%



Fisheries 79%



Seagrass 20%



Forests 3%



Ghost army of actors, artists bamboozled Hitler

NICK SQUIRES
Daily Telegraph

Hollywood's finest answer the call to fool Nazis

They were known as the "Ghost Army", an eclectic group of actors, make-up artists and sound experts who together engineered one of the greatest deceptions in military history.

Using hundreds of inflatable tanks and artillery, deploying the latest sound technology and posing as drunken military officers in order to spread disinformation, the Ghost Army is credited with helping the Allies win the war in Europe and saving thousands of British and American lives.

During the course of five major campaigns, the unit arranged 20 intricately planned battlefield deceptions, from Normandy to the Rhine, in order to trick Hitler's armies into believing that Allied forces were in places they were not.

For decades the soldiers were not allowed to talk of their extraordinary war record and the existence of the unit was denied by the Pentagon.

But now, more than 65 years on, the extraordinary work of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops is being detailed in a documentary and

an exhibition in the United States.

The top secret unit, which carried out its mission without firing a shot, consisted of around 1,100 make-up artists, actors, sound technicians, painters, photographers and press agents, many drawn from Hollywood.

Rick Beyer, 53, the documentary maker who has spent the past four years interviewing 21 surviving members of the unit, explained that the idea for the unit was born after General Bernard Montgomery deceived Rommel by building dummy tanks during the Battle of El Alamein.

Intrigued by the success of Britain's battlefield deceptions, American generals stationed in Britain before D-Day set to work on creating a unit of their own.

One of the most active backers of the new unit was the actor Douglas Fairbanks Jr., who was in Britain serving with the United States Naval Reserve and happened to be a friend of Lord Mountbatten's.

"Owing to his status as a Hollywood heartthrob he carried a lot of influence and he lobbied hard for

“By broadcasting fake radio traffic and using inflatable tanks... and artillery formations, they tried to convince German intelligence that they were an army of 30,000 men.”

the creation of the Ghost Army," said Beyer.

In keeping with its phantom creations, the formation's insignia was a white ghost on a black background, with three bolts of lightning shooting out of the ghoul's hand.

The unit was formed in 1943 and trained at Camp Forrest in Mississippi, with recruits drawn from acting schools, art academies, design ventures, agencies and set design companies.

In May 1944 it moved to Britain, where it was based near Stratford-on-Avon. The unit worked with the British on "Plan Fortitude", which created dummy bases and airfields prior to D-Day in order to try to

convince the Germans that the Allied landings would take place not in Normandy but around Calais or Brittany or even Norway.

The Ghost Army was sent to France eight days after D-Day and set about trying to deceive the Germans as to Allied positions and intentions. By broadcasting fake radio traffic and using inflatable tanks, jeeps and aircraft to create phantom cavalry and artillery formations, they tried to convince German reconnaissance and intelligence that they were an army of 30,000 men.

Techniques such as this were used to construct a fake Mulberry harbour on the Normandy beaches in order to draw German fire away from the real ones, to bottle up the German defenders of Brest by giving the impression that they were surrounded by a much larger force than was the case, and to trick the Germans when the Americans and British, under Montgomery, were preparing to cross the Rhine.

They played sound recordings of lumbering tanks and noisy troops, using state-of-the-art recording devices to project the sounds for up to

23 kilometres. "It could create the impression of a massive brigade preparing for battle," said Beyer.

The Ghost Army were also experts in espionage and intelligence, dressing up as senior officers and pretending to get drunk in towns that had been liberated by the Allies but which were suspected of still harbouring spies.

"They would talk loudly about false plans in bars and even let slip 'important' plans to prostitutes in brothels, hoping that this information would be passed on," said Beyer.

The unit's efforts to bamboozle the Germans produced some surreal moments. "We had one occasion in France where a fellow decided his tank would look better on the other side of the road, it would be a more natural place for it," said one veteran, AB Wilson.

"So these four guys pick up this tank and go walking across the road with it."

"And there was a Frenchman coming down the road that sees it, and he thought he was hallucinating to see four men pick up a tank."

The Ghost Army exhibition opens today at the University of Michigan.