



UGANDA, KENYA IN CROSS-BORDER PACT

Uganda and Kenya have agreed to a cross-border programme to protect nature and improve the livelihoods of the communities around Mount Elgon.

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) initiated the Mount Elgon Regional Ecosystem Conservation Programme. The project will help conserve nature and develop the livelihoods of the people. The head of the IUCN programmes in Uganda referred to Mount Elgon as a water tower as it provided water flowing into Lakes Victoria, Kyoga and Turkana in Kenya. He said the area is rich in biodiversity which should be protected. (Source: *New Vision* [Kampala], 23 March 2004.)



PROTECTING THE AMAZON

Ministers from eight South American countries have gathered in the Brazilian city of Manaus to consider a pact for preserving the Amazonian rain forest.

The foreign ministers of Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guyana and Suriname are meeting as members of the Amazonian Cooperation Treaty Organization. They are reviewing a strategic plan drafted for 2004 to 2012.

The plan is designed to reduce deforestation and promote the

sustainable use of the region's natural resources. It includes a scheme for regional economic integration that would reduce harmful development of the Amazon forest. (Source: *VOA News*, 14 September 2004.)

BRAZIL AMAZON DEFORESTATION JUMPS, DATA SHOW

An area of the Amazon jungle larger than the United States state of New Jersey has been destroyed this year and work on a new highway is mainly to blame, the environmental group Friends of the Earth and the government said on Wednesday.

The preliminary figures are based on a satellite system which has been monitoring Amazon deforestation on a test basis. The government's yearly figures, released in March, are based on data from a different satellite system. The satellite images indicated that between 8 920 and 9 420 square miles was cut down this year.

If confirmed that the total figure for this year's deforestation will be above the 2002–2003 level of 9 170 square miles, said Roberto Smeraldi, head of Friends of the Earth in Brazil. The figure was especially worrying because it showed that for the first time in history Amazon deforestation rose despite a slowdown in agriculture during the year, he said.

Small farmers have been major culprits in the trend as they hack away at Amazon jungle to expand their fields. (Source: *Reuters*, 1 December 2004 [in *Amazon News*, 2 December 2004].)



Environmentalists fear the destruction of the Amazon, an area of continuous tropical forest larger than western Europe, since it is home to up to 30 percent of the planet's species and is a source of medicines. (Source: *The Guardian*, 8 April 2004 [in *Amazon News*, 8 April 2004].)



ECOTOURISM

Laos discovers lucrative ecotourism niche

In the mountains of northern Lao People's Democratic Republic, home to the Akha, Hmong and 36 other officially recognized ethnic groups, trekkers are guided to carefully selected tribal villages which receive for each tourist 10 000 kip (US\$1.30) to be used for medicine, schooling and general community welfare. The guides are locally recruited and knowledgeable, and groups are limited to a maximum of eight.

With tourist income coming in, illegal logging and hunting of wildlife by poor tribespeople have diminished and health conditions are improving. The Luang Nam Tha area, with its trekking trails, village destinations and The Boat Landing Guest House, an exemplary ecolodge, will be used as a field-training site for guides and tourism officials from other provinces where similar projects will be initiated.

Tourist numbers have increased from 37 600 in 1991 to about 700 000 in 2003.



Tourism was the major foreign income earner in 2000, adding US\$113 million to the country's meagre coffers.

In a still largely subsistence economy, community-based tourism brings in cash needed by rural people for basic goods and may keep them from migrating to towns in search of jobs. Village women can make more in one hour by cooking for a tourist than collecting bamboo shoots in the forest for a week. Some of the best guides can earn US\$5 a day instead of killing a bird for US\$1. (Source: Associated Press, 5 April 2004 [in Community Forestry E-News, 2004.03].)



Ecotourism agitates animals

Animals in areas that promote ecotourism have changed behaviour, heart rates and stress hormone levels, according to a recent report in the *New Scientist*. In response, conservationists have called for research on the impact of ecotourism on animals and for studies to be conducted before ecotourism projects are initiated. (Source: *New Scientist*, 4 March 2004 [in IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin Linkages Update, 16 March 2004].)

Damming Belize

Belize's western mountains are an ecotourist's dream: a largely uninhabited region of dense tropical forests, wild rivers, cave complexes, Mayan ruins and bountiful wildlife. While many of its Central American neighbours were clearing forests to make way for slash-and-burn agriculture, Belize has been making far more money keeping the trees in place. Today tourism – almost all of it nature-based – accounts for a fifth of the nation's economic activity and employs a

quarter of its workforce. The mountainous Cayo region is one of the main draws.

But the Government of Belize is determined to build a dam on the upper Macal River, smack in the heart of Cayo. The US\$30 million Chalillo dam will flood 1 350 ha of tropical forest that is home to jaguars, ocelots, tapirs and the country's only known flock of the rare and colourful scarlet macaw. "This is the prettiest river in the country," says Mick Fleming, who owns an ecotourism resort set in the jungle 30 km downstream from the dam site. "We're going to lose something incredibly valuable in return for an extremely small amount of power." Plenty of people in Cayo agree with Fleming's assessment. The city council in the district capital, San Ignacio, opposes the dam.

Belize is extremely short of electricity, but it is unclear whether Chalillo is the best way to meet the shortfall. Fortis Inc., the big Canadian company that will build, own and operate the US\$30 million dam, says it will double generating capacity on the Macal River. "We believe hydroelectricity is the most environmentally friendly type of energy out there and the most cost-effective for Belize," says spokesperson Donna Hynes.

But while the dam will substantially boost domestic electricity production, most of the power will be generated at times of the day when it is more expensive than importing it from Mexico. A 2000 study by the California-based Conservation Strategy Fund estimated the project would be a net drag on the Belizean economy. The dam is also being built near an active fault line, and Fortis admitted that it mischaracterized the geological properties of the site. (Source: *Our Planet*, E/The Environmental Magazine.)



ECOTOURS

Community development in the Amazon

Projeto Bagagem is a non-profit initiative which promotes community-based tourism in Brazilian sites. Through one-week trips, "Project Backpack" takes small groups of people to Brazilian "off the beaten track" communities. Since 2001, the project has already taken four small groups of people to river communities in the Amazon. The idea behind the project is to enable visitors to experience community life as it is, to exchange ideas and experiences in a learning process where both the visitors and the communities benefit. (For more information, please visit: www.biosferabrasil.com/meu_produto.php?cod=27)

Forestry and wetland conservation in Africa

ECODECO is promoting an ecotourism tour package across East Africa, to some of the destinations where forestry and wetland conservation have been initiated through tourism. This is a tour package lasting from three to 14 days, across East Africa. Proceeds from these tours go towards forestry and wetland conservation, are inexpensive and clients are given special treatment. (For more information, please contact: volunteersafrica@yahoo.com) (Source: *Forest Information Update*, 18 October 2004.) ●