



Handy hemp

AS PART OF the campaign to wean North Americans off old growth forests, environmentalists are starting to promote "tree-free" paper. The ideal fibre, they argue, is hemp (*Cannabis sativa*) which is claimed to have been the world's largest agricultural crop until the 19th century.

Among its different properties, hemp:

- Uses the sun more efficiently than virtually any other plant on earth;
- grows in virtually any climate or soil, even in marginal areas;
- does not require chemicals to combat insect pests.

One hectare of hemp can produce four times as much pulp as a hectare of forest. Hemp also requires much less energy to convert into fibre than trees do, and the only chemical needed to bleach it is hydrogen peroxide, less of a concern than chlorine, the main chemical used to bleach fibre.

Other alternatives to wood pulp are cotton, jute, flax, rice and wheat stubble.

Source: *Earth Island Journal*

Longline losses

SOME SPECIES OF ALBATROSS and the endangered Hawaiian monk seal are facing a serious threat from longline fishers targeting broadbill swordfish around the north-west Hawaiian archipelago.

Each day, a boat will set and retrieve one line up to 55 km long with 450-700 hooks. Birds and seals swallow the baited hooks and are injured or drowned. Some fishers have taken extreme measures to keep birds away from baits, including shooting as many birds as they can, injuring one bird and leaving it

flapping in the water to attract other birds to it while the boat moves on, and throwing baits containing large pieces of plastic or corrosive caustic chemicals to birds to kill or scare them.

It is alleged that more than 1000 albatrosses have been slaughtered in one day by the longliners. Mutilated albatrosses have landed on colonies - one with its beak missing.

In nine days during January this year, eight monk seals were found with injuries associated with longline fishery and those are only the ones that survived to make it onshore. There are only 1200 Hawaiian monk seals left.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council meeting wants to see the fishery closed within 30 km of the islands because of the wildlife toll.

Source: *Honolulu Advertiser*

Car growth defeats emission controls

DESPITE THE improvements made to engine efficiency, the increasing numbers of cars and trucks on the world's roads is overwhelming any gains, according to a new study.

The World Resources Institute, a respected Washington environmental think-tank, says that there are now 540 million vehicles in the world, a figure predicted to soar to nearly one billion early next century.

Between 1971 and 1987, CO₂ emissions from vehicles rose by 63 percent. In another 20 years the emissions may grow by 50 percent, increasing the menace of climate change and stratospheric ozone depletion.

The report says that car manufacturers must start to produce non-polluting cars or cars that do not use fossil fuels. One factor could assist in this - there are only 14 car manufacturing firms concentrated in North America, Japan and Western Europe.

Source: *Climate Alert*

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Birds engulfed by oil

IN MARCH the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) sent a team to the Middle East Gulf to assess the damage caused by the oil spill and assist in efforts to minimise damage to birds.

One piece of good news was that the spill was less extensive than originally feared. Instead of the estimated 11 million barrels of oil escaped into the Gulf, the overall estimate was one and a half million barrels.

The main species oiled were curlew sandpiper, terek sandpiper (both of which occur in New Zealand), curlew, redshank, greater sandplover, lesser sandplover, Kentish plover and slender-billed gull. Altogether 26 oiled species of birds were spotted.

Parrot rediscovered

THE NIGHT PARROT *Geopsittacus occidentalis* has been rediscovered near Mt Isa, Queensland. A solitary specimen in a

desiccated state was found in October 1990 by ornithologists from the Australian and Queensland Museums. The recovery of the skin authenticates rumours that have been circulating for several decades. The specimen found is the first seen for 120 years.

Conserving Pitta's last forest

IN 1986 one of the world's most beautiful and threatened birds, Gurney's pitta (*Pitta gurneyi*), was rediscovered in one of Thailand's last remaining pristine areas of lowland forest, Khao Noi Chuchi.

ICBP sent a team there to survey the forest. Their conclusion: it is the most important area for the species in Thailand, but also a stronghold for plants and other animals. The forest is a natural oasis in lowland Thailand which has been described as one of the most modified landscapes in the world.

A major project has been launched in the

area. Its main aims are to establish a forest reserve, promote non-detrimental farming practices, and set up a conservation education programme.

Saving the Sisserou

THE CAMPAIGN to save two of the world's most endangered parrots - the sisserou or imperial Amazon and the red-necked Amazon - appears to be succeeding. Both live around the Picard River in Dominica.

Since Project Sisserou was launched two years ago there has been a rise in the populations of the two parrots, now estimated at about 80 sisserou and 300 red-necked Amazons.

The ICBP/Dominican government/RARE project has bought 80 ha of the forest which is now a special reserve. Education programmes are teaching local people about the importance of the birds.