



Santo starling survives!

A RECENT EXPEDITION to Vanuatu has confirmed the existence of the Santo mountain starling *Aplonis santovestris*. Endemic to the island of Santo, the species has only ever been recorded on Vutimele and Tabwemasana mountains, in forest above 1,000 metres. Three specimens were taken in the 1930s, but the only subsequent observations were in the mid-1970s with several other searches failing to find the species.

The six-person team, which included New Zealand ornithologist Peter Montgomery as well as ornithologists from Australia and Vanuatu, visited Peak Santo in late 1991. The team made a number of confirmed sightings and although not able to put a figure on the number of starlings on Peak Santo, they estimate that a reasonable population exists. The bird's preference for forest over 1,000 metres means that it will never be widespread, but its habitat is, for the moment, reasonably intact.

Source: International Council for Bird Preservation

New threat to the Indian rhino

ASSAM IN NORTH-EAST India is the main stronghold of the greater one-horned or Indian rhinoceros. India designated the rhino a protected species in the 1970s when its numbers had fallen below a thousand, and since then the population has slowly increased. However, with rhino horn considered an aphrodisiac in parts of Asia and each horn fetching over \$30,000 on the wholesale market, poaching has always been a problem. But now a new threat is causing great

concern to wildlife officials.

A separatist tribal group, the Bodos, who live adjacent to one of the main reserves occupied by the rhino have increased their agitation against the central government. They have also taken to poaching to fund their independence movement. Many of the reserve guards have been frightened away or have been recalled for their own safety. Others were too scared to report poaching by the armed rebels. The result is that the killing of rhinos by the Bodos and professional poachers has substantially increased.

Source: Oryx

Mitsubishi Man

A COMIC BOOK has recently been doing the rounds in Japanese schools. It was sent to every school by the Mitsubishi Corporation in an attempt to counter negative publicity about the company's involvement in tropical rainforest logging. The star of the comic is Hino, a rather woolly-minded Mitsubishi executive who spends his time investigating charges against his company and then absolving it of all blame.

As Hino flies over the devastated forests of South-East Asia he decides that most of the deforestation is caused by slash-and-burn farming.

He meets a "world-famous botanist" who tells him that Mitsubishi's logging practices are perfectly sustainable. Hino concludes that the criticism levelled at his company is purely a result of Japan-bashing.

Now some facts.

Mitsubishi is the second largest Japanese importer of tropical timber – over one billion cubic metres in 1990. A quarter of it was from Sarawak and most of the rest was plywood from Indonesia. None of this was from a plantation or sustainable source. Mitsubishi also imports woodchips from clear-felled beech forests in Chile and is a partner in a clear-cut operation in British Columbia.

Looking up for Southern Ocean birds

BIRD PROTECTION in Antarctic waters was given a major boost at the 1991 meeting of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) held in Hobart last October.

The international convention manages marine resources south of the Antarctic Convergence including all areas south of the 60th parallel.

After reports of thousands

of seabirds being killed by net monitor cables around New Zealand and Kerguelen Islands in the Southern Ocean, the meeting agreed to ban these devices from 1 July 1994. Soviet trawlers are the only vessels still using these cables.

Until then the Soviet fleet will be required to use modified techniques to reduce bird mortality and report annually on moves to remove net monitor cables on their fleet of 100 vessels in the Southern Ocean.

A major disappointment of the meeting was the failure to close the Patagonian toothfish fishery around South Georgia. Evidence presented to the meeting by Greenpeace and the British Antarctic Survey showed that long line vessels were incidentally killing over a thousand sea birds a year, most of them albatrosses.

As an interim measure the meeting agreed to require longline fishing vessels to carry "tori" poles – streamers extending behind the vessel – to deter birds diving for baited hooks. Additional measures are likely to be looked at next year to reduce bird deaths.

Progress was also made on fisheries conservation. The meeting agreed to close most of the finfish fisheries in the seas around South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula for the next year. This should allow many of these depleted fisheries to start rebuilding.

It also established a precautionary limit on krill fishing around South Georgia and the Antarctic. Although the limit is well above the current catch, it is the first time CCAMLR has set such a cap on Antarctic fishing and is a major step forward for Antarctic marine conservation.

At last CCAMLR is beginning to take a realistic approach to the past over-

