



Durrell News

Expedition fails to find evidence of extinct duck

Monday 17 December 2007

Abstract:

Durrell scientists call for urgent action to save Madagascar pochard. Scientists at The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust are putting together an emergency action plan for a duck so rare it was believed extinct until last winter.

Body:

Scientists at The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust are putting together an emergency action plan for a duck so rare it was believed extinct until last winter.

Dr Glyn Young recently participated in an expedition into Madagascar aimed at finding further populations of the Madagascar pochard – a medium-sized diving duck.

The duck had been considered extinct by many authorities for more than ten years, until last winter's sighting of nine adults and four juveniles.

Dr Young, who works within Durrell's ornithology department and has conducted research on all Madagascar's ducks since 1989, said: "As soon as the bird was rediscovered, I was invited to Madagascar to establish how secure these birds were and whether there were any immediate threats. The population was in an extremely isolated location which boded well for its security."

According to Dr Young the ducks were found in a slightly different habitat and in a different location to what had been expected, sparking new hopes that there might be similar, undiscovered populations in Madagascar.

He said: "The Madagascar pochard is extremely secretive and little is known about its life-cycle and behaviour. It was believed that they preferred marshy lakes with lots of reeds and emergent vegetation but the newly discovered population was found in a steep sided volcanic lake with little shoreline marsh and reeds."

This year's expedition was aimed at locating further populations of the bird, but sadly four weeks of surveying Madagascar's remote hill-sides yielded no further sightings.

Dr Young added: "The failure to find any other populations of the duck highlights the need for

immediate conservation intervention to save this species. The Durrell team will be working closely with other conservation organisations over the coming weeks to develop a strategy that will stop this species disappearing off the face of the earth.”

The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust works with a range of endangered animals in Madagascar, running captive breeding programmes and working closely with the people of Madagascar to help preserve important habitats. They are currently running successful conservation programmes for Meller’s duck and the Madagascar teal which, like the Madagascar pochard, are found only on Madagascar.

Research on the Madagascar pochard and conservation of the site is being led by The Peregrine Fund in collaboration with Madagascar’s Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests as well as a number of conservation organisations including Durrell and Conservation International.

...end...

Issued for: Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust

Issued by: Hare Carding – tel: 023 9232 4528 contact Angela Chadwick



Kelly Barker, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Press Office

Tel: +44 (0)1534 860081/00

Fax: +44 (0)1534 860001

Email: pressoffice@durrell.org

Website: www.durrell.org

Note to editors:

The Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust was founded by author and naturalist Gerald Durrell fifty years ago with a mission to save species worldwide, and it has a proven track record of doing just that. Species that have been pulled back from the brink include the Mauritius kestrel, pink pigeon, echo parakeet and Mallorcan midwife toad, and our dedicated conservationists are hard at work in threatened habitats around the world continuing the battle to protect and conserve many more.

With its international headquarters in Jersey, the Trust has built up a worldwide reputation for its pioneering conservation techniques, developed under the leadership of its founder, the late renowned author and naturalist Gerald Durrell. Today, Durrell Wildlife is continuing to develop its overseas work in new areas of the world, with a particular focus on vulnerable communities of endemic animals, which make such a valuable contribution to global biodiversity.

"When asked, as I frequently am, why I should concern myself so deeply with the conservation of animal life, I reply that I have been very lucky and that throughout my life the world has given me the most enormous pleasure. But the world is as delicate and as complicated as a spider's web. If you touch one thread you send shudders running through all the other threads. We are not just touching the web we are tearing great holes in it." **Gerald Durrell 1925-1995.**