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Unsavoury truths...

This month's newsletter is a full read with reports that touch upon some of the big environmental issues. Joanna Blythman and Tom Levitt take a more considered look at the recent egg contamination scare than you probably would have read elsewhere, highlighting that rather than being an isolated case this is likely to be the latest horror story to arise from our growing reliance on industrial farming systems. Their alarming report echoes what The Ecologist has been saying for many years - that pressure to supply cheap food is resulting in a host of disturbing consequences for human health, the environment and animal welfare.

The worrying issue is that every time such stories break - whether it's industrial poultry production being linked to the H5N1 strain of avian flu, or the MRSA bug found to be prevalent in pig farms - there is a flurry of concern and outrage from industry and ministers followed by pledges to tackle the problem, but very little actually changes. Until the blight of industrial agri-business is tackled as a whole it is an uncomfortable reality that food contamination and health scares will only increase - with potentially deadly results.

Sticking with the big picture, Mohammad Rakibul Hasan's remarkable photo-story shines a rare light on the lives of some of those, quite literally, struggling to survive on the climate front-line. His startling photographs and commentary - taken in Bangladesh's impoverished coastal regions that are highly vulnerable to climate-related natural disasters - perhaps do more to convey the perils of climate change than any number of 'warnings' issued at the political circuses of Cancun or Copenhagen.

To the Middle East where, as William Parry reports, there's a hidden and troubling conflict taking place over the region's water supplies. The piece highlights, however, the work of the pioneering British activists tackling these problems using permaculture... we'll keep you updated.

From land to sea, and Nick Kettles this month uncovers the unpalatable truth about shark fin soup. As he reports, millions of sharks are being slaughtered annually to feed growing demand, and campaigners believe this is one of those instances where consumer awareness and action has a vital role to play. Shark fin soup can be found on the menu at Chinese restaurants (and elsewhere) across the globe. Refuse to eat the stuff - or decline to dine in establishments where it's on sale - and point out to restaurant staff the unsustainable and cruel reality behind the dish.

Elsewhere, Chris Pala examines the Caribbean's last healthy coral reefs; Jan Goodey reports on the growing dispute over the Bexhill bypass; Matilda Lee meets the Environmental Investigation Agency, and Emily Apple explains why the 'outed' undercover cop Mark Kennedy has ruined lives.... as well as the reputation of the Metropolitan police.

Andrew Wasley, editor.

Front Cover: Mohammad Rakibul Hasan; on the climate front line.

Bexhill bypass puts road building back on activists' radar



*Between 1992 and 1997 opposition to the government's road building scheme led to massive protests, such as here at the site of the Newbury Bypass.
Photo: Antonio Olmos*

Opponents say the controversial bypass will damage ancient woodlands, disturb wetland birds and impact on protected areas - and it's just one of 22 similar schemes currently awaiting approval. **Jan Goodey** investigates

Combe Haven Valley has been described as one of the finest undeveloped river valleys in the South-East. 'It experiences almost no traffic, [and] it is an exceptionally tranquil oasis in one of England's busiest regions,' according to one environmentalist. This is the type of outstanding

landscape in the firing line thanks to the Coalition Government's current road building policy, despite the hiatus which followed the nineties boom.

In this particular case, as Dominic Franklin, a veteran of the 90s' road protests says; the proposed Bexhill Bypass, 'would have a major impact on two sites of special scientific interest [Combe Haven and Marline Valley], in terms of habitat severance, disruption of hydrology, loss of ancient woodland, and disturbance to wetland bird populations [including lapwings and redshanks] and protected species like dormice.'

But before we look at national policy, it's worth considering the arguments for and against this £95 million scheme as it does exemplify the issue and illustrate what's at stake. Tory MP for Hastings & Rye, Amber Rudd, and East Sussex County Council [ESCC] leader, Peter Jones, both claim the road is an essential part of regeneration strategy with an estimated 2,000 jobs allied to it. Cllr Jones has said: 'This is not just a road. This is about prosperity. More than £300 million of investment has already gone into the area and the link road is absolutely central to its future economic development. It will bring real benefits to residents and businesses, providing access to new business space, creating jobs and helping companies thrive. It will also give developers access to much-needed housing development that will help the two towns grow as communities.'

Car dependency

The Hastings Alliance [HA] which is formed of local wildlife and amenity groups in nearby communities, sees it differently. 'The link road would lock us into an unsustainable, car-dependent

future and outmoded models of development that belong to the 1960s,' HA chairperson, Nick Bingham, told The Ecologist. 'We can and must do better than that, and upgrade and increase our investment in sustainable transport accessible to all sections of society. It's precisely because of the existing and potential public transport connections that Saga has chosen to bring 800 plus jobs into the town.'

Derrick Coffee, also of HA, adds: 'There is a strong possibility that some of the out of town jobs generated by this road will simply replace "in-town" jobs which would mean those who currently walk to work would have to get a car. This is not an option for an area where only 39 per cent of households have one. Small businesses are a positive feature of both Bexhill and Hastings; with the link road they could disappear.'

But what of the current congestion in and around Bexhill? According to the HA the benefits of the road and the estimated reduction to journey times (on average under five minutes) are negligible, especially when you take into account that the success of the town's manufacturing and retail sectors during the recession. Bingham and Coffee point to alternatives such as Workplace Travel Plans, with the county council putting in place strategies to help local businesses; a new £5 million railway station at Glyne Gap with its metro style service between Bexhill and Hastings, integrating with improved bus services; and, finally, the planned Bexhill to Hastings Cycleway due to be built in July 2011.

Relocations

But it appears such alternatives are consistently overlooked in general

as well as specifically in this case, where according to the South East Forum for Sustainability, the 2,000 jobs to which Amber Rudd refers are largely existing jobs relocating out of town (80 per cent), while the economic benefits of the road are almost wholly (70 per cent) made up of short time savings of around five minutes. And it seems the Department for Transport (DfT) still works from the self same NATA (new approach to appraisal) evaluation which assesses roads' economic value in relation to average journey times saved, despite reservations held by ministers, Theresa Villiers and Norman Baker.

Mr Baker, MP for Lewes, is in charge of local transport and told The Ecologist: 'We have been clear that our priority is to reduce the deficit, while building a transport system that supports sustainable economic growth and reduces carbon. To ensure we get maximum value for money for every pound we spend we've challenged scheme promoters to consider the scope and cost of proposed schemes, options for lower cost alternatives and their ability to contribute more locally. In the case of the Bexhill to Hastings link road, it is for East Sussex County Council to decide whether after doing this work the scheme remains a priority and submit a best and final funding bid to me for consideration.'

Roads competing for cash Baker refers to new sources of funding (as yet no developer contributions have been secured) as well as alternatives to the scheme that ESCC will have to come up with by autumn 2011. The road is now in a 'development pool' of 22 similar schemes - roads, which didn't get the green light following October's spending review, now competing for a pot of £600 million. And this is one of the key planks of government policy

for devolving power to the regions and promoting local authority enterprise.

The Campaign for Better Transport (CBT) is particularly scathing in their assessment of this approach with their roads spokesman Richard George telling *The Ecologist*: 'In practice this means tin-pot councillors being given free rein to develop completely unaffordable road schemes which do nothing for local traffic and make it harder to cut CO₂ and avoid climate change. It's unlikely that the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road will be built, as there isn't enough money to build all the schemes in the development group, and it has the worst benefit-cost ratio. 'And that's why it's all the more important for the government to tell East Sussex that [they] will keep plugging away at the link road instead of looking for cheaper options. They've already spent £15 million. The main thing that's keeping road building at bay for the moment is a severe lack of funding, and a few people, including Norman Baker, who understand that we cannot build our way out of congestion.'

Devolved campaigning

What do other interested parties have to say? Ironically, the Woodland Trust has adopted a similar strategy to the government by calling for devolved action with local communities encouraged to campaign in cases where ancient woods come under threat by roads. Nikki Williams, head of Woodland Trust campaigns, explained: 'The Trust isn't against roads per se but when a specific road development threatens unique, irreplaceable and dwindling habitat, then we will oppose it. With 450 known live cases of ancient woods under threat we have prioritise so depending on the size and/or

complexity of the case. We either advise our WoodWatch volunteers on how to protest locally, or we get involved directly ourselves.'

The A470 Snowdonia road improvement scheme is a case in point. Although the majority of the proposed Cross Foxes to Maes yr Helmau route poses no problems, 20 per cent of the route cuts through the Meirionnydd Oakwoods; an irreplaceable ancient woodland which has added merit of European protected status. Rory Francis of Coed Cadw (the Woodland Trust in Wales) said: 'Ancient woods are our richest and most important sites for a vast range of insects, birds, animals, flowers and trees and are home to more threatened species than any other UK habitat. We simply cannot afford to lose them, and planting small areas of new woodland can never compensate for their loss.'

A national roadbuilding programme?

Other high profile and equally controversial schemes include the £130 million Kingskerswell Bypass in south Devon which would run through the historic part of Kingskerswell village and through the garden of a listed house. The Norwich Northern Distributor Road is another. Skirting the north-eastern suburbs of Norwich, the CBT's Richard George says it is likely to have a severe impact on barn owls (a protected species), generate more traffic and open the greenbelt up to development.

What all the opponents of these roads are up against, is the policy outlined by Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond in October, following the comprehensive spending review: 'This government sees transport as a key driver of growth nationally and in the regions. Taken together, this investment will not only

bring benefits in terms of reduced congestion, shorter journey times and more efficient public transport, but also provide a vital economic boost.

'For every pound we spend on Highways Agency schemes, on average we will get back £6 of benefits and in many cases there are even higher returns for local authority schemes. Transport is vital to securing the UK's long term prosperity. That is why these schemes are so important and why I will continue to argue for investment which delivers long term benefits for both the travelling public and the economy as a whole.'

In a recent meeting organised by The Campaign for Better Transport with the Chair of the Transport Select Committee, Louise Ellman MP, Derrick Coffee of the Hastings Alliance managed to turn the tables on Hammond and air some reservations.

'I asked why are big transport projects with low benefit/cost ratios are favoured over small schemes. The implications of climate change are still not informing decisions around transport. Why are supermarkets allowed to get away with large allocations of land for free parking? A charge would produce useful funds for alternative transport and encourage less wasteful uses of land. Funding for cycling training over the UK has been invaluable but is now being threatened – why?' A decision on the Bexhill bypass and the 21 other schemes in the development pool is expected by the end of December 2011.

Can British activists solve Middle Eastern water conflicts using permaculture?



Palestinians and Israelis alike face increasing desertification and a hotter, drier climate

An unreported war over natural resources in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories has led students from Bangor University to set up a radical eco-movement, Bustan al Qaraaqa, to tackle the issue.

Words and pictures: **William Parry**

There's an asymmetrical conflict that's been unfolding for decades in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories that never makes the headlines and yet is having devastating consequences: it's a war over natural resources in the mythical land of milk and honey. Palestinians and Israelis alike face increasing environmental challenges as global warming affects the region – particularly desertification and an increasingly hotter, drier climate. Under Israel's illegal occupation, however, which

began in 1967, the environmental challenges are being exacerbated by Israeli measures to limit the adverse environmental affects on its population by increasingly restricting Palestinian access to Palestinian land and water resources. It's a calculated process that Palestinians say is tantamount to ethnic cleansing and which breaches international law. Spend any time travelling throughout the region and you will see scores of aid agencies involved in hundreds of humanitarian projects. Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are among the top

recipients of foreign aid in the world. Rather than tackle the root causes of the conflict, the West prefers to pour billions of dollars into the occupied territories in top-down development projects – and much of that flows into consultants' pockets. Which is partly the reason why, out of frustration, four former students from Bangor University in Wales came together in 2008 to create Bustan al Qaraaqa, or the Tortoise Garden, in the Bethlehem neighbourhood of Beit Sahour. Their mission: 'to propagate a grassroots environmental movement in the

Palestinian Territories to help combat ongoing humanitarian and environmental crises' – and to steer clear of top-down aid approaches.

Empowering communities

Bustan al Qaraaqa is situated in a handsome old, rustic, three-floor Palestinian home, made largely out of stone. One of its co-founders, Alice Grey, an ecologist who lectures part-time at Bir Zeit University, near Ramallah, previously spent several years working as a development consultant.

'Really, it was my job to dampen the hopes of anyone who thought that throwing money at the problem would make it go away. You can say: "I've got \$20m, I will save Palestinians from water shortages." But you won't because amongst other things there are environmental constraints. But there are also the constraints of the occupation, so you can expect to spend seven years acquiring [an

Israeli issued] permit for a project and you'll probably have spent your \$20m by then on consultants' fees. This is what happens,' she told *The Ecologist*. 'For the amount of money that's being [pumped into Palestine], the achievements are very slim,' she says.

Hence Bustan al Qaraaqa's permaculture project. 'We feel that where governments and development agencies are failing, perhaps individuals and communities can succeed if only they recognise their own power to deal with the problems that are facing them,' reads their website. 'Working closely with our neighbours, we are creating a model permaculture farm, to serve as a centre for experimentation with and demonstration of cheap and easy techniques for sustainable living and food production.'

All of this is abundantly evident. On the rooftop is a solar oven for slow cooking meals. In the kitchen, Grey demonstrates to *The Ecologist* their system for washing up. Dishes and cutlery soak in water populated

with a dozen or so lemon halves in one plastic basin; another plastic basin of water is used to rinse dishes, which will then become the water used for soaking the dishes – and the old washing up water will be used to water plants. Showers are often opportunities to also wash laundry. They also use a waterless toilet system that provides fertiliser for their plants. In a region affected by experiences chronic water shortages, Grey is proud of how efficiently the organisation and its volunteers use and recycle water.

Opposite the West Bank's only tree nursery, which was struggling somewhat with the prolonged drought and heat, there is a cave that's been converted into a hostel room for volunteers and visitors when guest numbers are high. Each bed foundation is constructed out of tyres and rubbish, around which a combination of straw, mud and manure has been added to provide a solid base, with a mattress thrown on top. They don't throw away any waste but try to recycle everything,



When the guest house fills up, volunteers sleep in this cave on the premises.



Bustan al Qaraaqa HQ from the field that the organisation plants with a range of trees.

and there are hidden stacks of rubbish stored for future use. It's hippy living and everyone, including three volunteers from Australia and the US, seemed dedicated yet relaxed.

It is Bustan al Qaraaqa's community ecological projects and advocacy work that are most likely to have the biggest local impact however. 'One of the main issues here is population growth,' says Grey. 'Here, populations have become politicised, seen [by both Palestinians and Jews] as a political advantage. You also have the ambient problem of climate change, which in the Middle East is manifesting itself as increased droughts. So you have increasing numbers of people, a decreasing resources base, particularly in terms of water, which affects the costs of producing food, and in an arid zone this manifests itself as desertification. The West Bank is between the Judean desert to the east and the Naqab [Negev] desert to the south. If you consider the two deserts expanding, with Israel expanding from the west [through its colonisation], you can see Palestinians being pushed to increasingly marginal land, especially with Israel's strategy to take the most fertile land.'

Water conflicts

And water resources: since 1967 Israel has controlled all water resources in the West Bank, and a number of respected organisations, including the World Bank, the World Health Organisation, Amnesty International and now Human Rights Watch, have catalogued Israel's allegedly illegal allocation and disproportionate use of West Bank water resources. The latter's latest report on Israeli settlements notes: 'Average Israeli per capita consumption of water—including water consumption by settlers—is 4.3 times that of Palestinians in the occupied territories (including Gaza), according to the World Health Organization. In the Jordan Valley, an estimated 9,000 settlers in Israeli agricultural settlements use one-quarter the total amount of water consumed by the entire Palestinian population of the West Bank, some 2.5 million people.' Grey and her colleagues are thus attempting to introduce new techniques – and to reintroduce traditional methods – that empower the local population, making them more self-reliant through sustainably increasing food and water security. With already-acute water shortages and Israel's refusal to allow the construction of adequate sewage infrastructure – there is just one sewage treatment plant for the entire West Bank

population, processing just 10 per cent of all sewage, with the rest entering the ecosystem untreated – Grey advocates more widespread use of waterless toilets.

'Environmentally, if you know the situation, you can't justify having a flush toilet unless you don't have the space to build a composting toilet. It's also [myopic] with respect to wasting 30 litres of drinking water a day – that's about 40 per cent of each household's daily drinking water, flushed down the loo.'

Palestinians and local desert communities have depended on rain harvesting and catchment techniques for millennia – using rain water harvesting through cisterns, and earth work structures like gabions and terraces to reduce run-off of water and top soil nutrients. Modernisation, says Grey, has meant that many local urban communities have come to regard these traditional techniques as outdated and unnecessary.

'Of course there are plenty of examples of permaculture being practised by Palestinians, as they've traditionally done, especially in refugee camps, where there are acute water shortages. It hasn't been lost, it's still there, and it's been a necessity for generations. But I think there's an element of... sometimes I call it "obsession with shiny things",' she says. 'It's



Residents travel towards their allocated agricultural gate to access their farm land.



The centre's fledgling (& dehydrated)-tree nursery.

trying to modernise, aspirations to Western affluence or culture or elements of it. People have got into their heads that [piped] water is the only decent quality water.'

Tree planting and aquaponics

Bustan al Qaraaqa's on-going flagship projects are tree planting and fish farming. Grey notes that trees are instrumental in ameliorating soil erosion particularly in the West Bank's climate, and as a foraging crop in a system where over-grazing exacerbates climate issues. Several species are nitrogen fixers, which help nourish the soil, providing nutrients for other plant life. However, many local Bedouin communities see value in planting only fruit trees, given the devastating economic impact of Israel's occupation. The organisation's small but expanding tree nursery offers free trees and includes local species such as caroub, native oak, pistachio, *Acacias tortalis*, as well as a few exotics like *Leucaena leucocephala* and mesquite. All of these are suited for different terrains and help ameliorate soil erosion. The centre's fish farm project was still being developed when The Ecologist visited, and they are working on building a breeding population of fish. They aim to go to farming communities that have a

reliable source of water, whether a spring or a well, and holding tanks, and to set up fish farms in these existing systems.

'It's very low input,' says Grey. 'Farmers fertilise the water a bit with goat shit, which they already have, which encourages the growth of aquatic plants, and the fish eat them. In turn, the fish shit in the water and you have more fertilised water for irrigating crops, which cuts expenses on fertiliser.' Grey says they hope to expand this idea to aquaponics – 'a really compact system of fish farming and growing a plant crop' – in communities like refugee camps with limited space and water resources, and are currently looking for funding for pilot projects.

Bustan al Qaraaqa and its volunteers are also working with Palestinians on land defence projects – planting trees, digging wells and creating irrigation systems. Israel's separation wall,

deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004, is the latest tool that Israel is using to separate Palestinian communities from their land. It is unilaterally annexing ten per cent of the West Bank, including prime farming land and aquifer resources.

The farming community – one of the largest sectors of the Palestinian economy – is being displaced by the wall and its permit regime. In many farming communities, up to 80 per cent of farmers have been refused 'visitor permits' to access their land and water resources, according to the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), perversely making communities that were formerly the bread basket of the West Bank reliant on food aid and making farming largely uneconomical. In contrast, Israel's subsidised agricultural sector – part of which pillages West Bank resources – floods Palestinian communities with cheap produce. Barring Palestinians from accessing their land, either via the wall or by declaring areas closed military areas, Israel exploits an old Ottoman law which states that land unworked for three years can be transferred to the state. Involving international volunteers is part of al Qaraaqa's advocacy work. Clare Gillis, a historian from Connecticut, USA, said that her month at the organisation has given her a great deal 'of insight into [ecology, as well as] the illegal, preferential, apartheid system of water distribution in the territories.'



Abu Azzam, the largest land owner in Jayyous, points to his land, which is caught between the separation wall and the Green Line.

Revealed: how demand for shark fin soup fuels **bloody harvest**



*Sharks are increasingly slaughtered for shark fin soup
Photo: ANN / Shark Action*

Following Channel 4's *Big Fish Fight* where Gordon Ramsay took on shark finning, **Nick Kettles** investigates how the increasing popularity of fin soup is leading to the massacre of millions of sharks globally



Before his death four years ago, author of the book and blockbuster 70s film, *Jaws*, and environmental campaigner, Peter

Benchley, made one of many attempts to redress the impact his creation had had on our understanding of sharks and the need to conserve marine ecosystems. Speaking as a member of the National Council of Environmental Defense, he said: 'The shark in an updated [version of] *Jaws* could not be the villain; it would have to be written as the victim, for worldwide, sharks are much more the oppressed than the oppressors.'

And indeed, oppressed they are. Today, according to the Shark Specialist Group, a group of 160 experts from 90 countries, overfishing - largely to meet demand for shark fin soup in China - has caused many shark populations to decline steeply. More than 25 per cent of all pelagic (open water) sharks, 35 per cent of epipelagic (those that live closer to the surface) and over half of large oceanic pelagic sharks, are classified as threatened in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

Unlike some other fisheries, the slow growth, late maturity, and small number of young, make sharks particularly vulnerable to overfishing, and numbers are very slow to recover once depleted. What makes this decline in shark

populations even more startling is the barbaric way in which it has occurred. Resulting in the deaths of approximately 100 million sharks each year, shark finning is the practice of cutting off the shark's fins and throwing the still living shark back into the sea to die. Practiced worldwide, shark finning is considered inhumane and wasteful, and is responsible, according to NGO WildAid, for the 90 per cent decline in shark populations over the last 50 years.

There is an easy financial logic for shark fishermen. Prices for shark meat in European markets ranges from 1 to 7 euros per kilo, while processed fins can fetch anything from 90 to 300 euros per kilo in Hong Kong. Shark fins are now among the world's most valuable fisheries products.

Compared to shark meat which can be difficult to store and maintain in good condition, fins are easy to air-dry or freeze for storage onboard fishing vessels, and take up very little space. And, although some fisheries target sharks solely for their fins, finning also happens when vessels take large numbers of sharks as 'bycatch', usually via long lining - a fishing method involving multi-hook lines up to 100 miles long, used to catch tuna and swordfish.

When long line fishermen cannot easily access markets for shark meat by-catch at landing sites, the fin is more than ample compensation for the inconvenience of missing their target catch. Indeed, independent reports suggest long line fishermen sometimes end up with more shark by-catch than the bony fish they are supposed to be catching. Ocean advocacy group Oceana estimates that Hong Kong alone

imports 10 million kilos of shark fin each year from as many as 87 countries, with Spain, Singapore and Taiwan the biggest suppliers.

The tasteless impact of China's cultural aspiration

So how did a simple regional dish, place such an unsustainable demand on global shark populations? After a loose ban during the Mao era, where it was considered a bourgeois delicacy, over the last 20 years shark fin soup has made a come back. Although the fin is almost tasteless and the soup ends up being flavoured with chicken stock, today it is seen as an absolute must at important functions, such as weddings and state functions. At restaurants, shark fin soup can easily cost upwards of \$100 per bowl, and is being consumed in increasing quantities.

Steve Trent, President of WildAid told *The Ecologist*: 'The pace and depth of economic change in China over the last 25 years has been profound. In the next 10 years there will be up to 250 million relatively middle class urban-living people with disposable income in a highly aspirational culture, where the need and social benefits of showing off wealth are high. This will mean a potentially higher demand for shark fin soup because of the status it confers on both the giver and receiver.'

The impact of this continued consumption, he adds, will potentially, be catastrophic: 'Seen through the lens of economic security, sharks need better protection because they play a key role in maintaining the health of our marine ecosystems and with this, other commercially valuable fisheries. By removing sharks it is clear that other species could be disrupted, possibly with serious negative consequences.'

The Lensfest Ocean Program, in a 2010 study of how large sharks

shape marine communities, says that the net result of decline in shark populations are cascading effects through food webs. For example the elimination of larger sharks can cause meso-predators, one step down the food chain, such as smaller shark species and rays, to increase in number, and in some instances, as a 2007 study by Dalhousie University shows, this can result in the consumption of greater numbers of smaller fish, crustaceans and shellfish, including some commercially important species.

The Dalhousie study showed that as shark numbers plummeted to less than five per cent of original populations in US east coast seas, their natural prey, including the Cownose ray increased considerably. Researchers already knew from earlier studies in the 1980's, that bay scallops on the North Carolina coast survived the Cownose ray predation during their summer migration, but found that by 2004, the rays had completely devastated the scallop population and ended the region's century-old bay scallop industry.

Moreover, as highly migratory species with vast roaming ranges, the decimation of sharks in one area may also have consequences for many different eco-systems.

Loopholes, leniency, and what the eye doesn't see

Shark finning is prohibited by more than 20 shark fishing countries and many Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), using a variety of enforcement strategies. The most common enforcement method is to limit the ratio of fin to carcass weight and require that sharks be landed with their fins naturally attached to their bodies; thus providing vital information about species populations and their decline.

A recent report, by the IUCN Shark Specialist Group (SSG) and

the European Elasmobranch Association (EEA) recommends this method which is being mandated for an increasing number of fisheries, particularly in Central and North America, and creating momentum for global change. These changes have been reflected in recent statements by the United Nations General Assembly, the Fish Stocks Agreement Review Conference in 2010 and in RFMO expert discussions.

However, there are still significant territories whose regulations and or enforcement techniques fall short. It is true that the European Parliament has too, this month, called for a proposal to close loopholes in existing shark finning regulations, which the IUCN, SSG and EEA report says make it possible for EU fishermen to fin an estimated two out of every three sharks without detection or punishment, but that is unlikely to come into force for some time.

And, even when it does, there is no guarantee that it will be enforced. The bottom line is that while there is no inherent conflict between having sustainable industry and environmental controls, the myopic tendency towards short term profits remains strong.

The experience of Egypt, where it's not just illegal to fin sharks, but to actually catch and sell them, is informative. In 2010 a diving operator alerted the Egyptian navy to a fishing boat from neighbouring Yemen which, when apprehended, was found to be carrying hundreds of slaughtered Tiger Sharks, Oceanic White Tips, and Hammerheads. Nevertheless, with sizeable profits to be made, there is no shortage of others willing to take the place of the arrested Yemeni fishermen. The same pattern appears in other low income countries, where fishermen are often pressurised by black market operators into finning sharks as fast as possible to increase their measly pay – sometimes less than 1 per cent of the retail value of the fin.

The power of countries yet to impose a ban on finning should not be underestimated either. In March 2010, China, Japan and Russia helped defeat a proposal at a U.N wildlife trade meeting calling for increased transparency in the shark trade, expressing concern that the measure would hurt poor nations and could be handled by regional bodies instead. The same regional boards which some campaigners say answer to their commercial directors, not the executive branch of their governments, or the UN. In the meantime, there are those such as award winning Costa Rican marine biologist-turned-shark activist, Randall Arauz, who think we need a more fundamental shift of tack. 'Instead of basing reform on quota's based on individual species we need to shift the framework to ecosystem management which also takes into account each species natural predator, and prey,' he says. As highly migratory species, this kind of eco-system management will need full international co-operation and better engagement with the major consuming markets, especially China.

To do that, Steve Trent says we need to update our somewhat morally righteous view of China: 'Of course we should give constructive and forceful criticism but also invite them to take the lead; ultimately, it could be the Chinese who come to realise and demonstrate that the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment.'

Can the public ever love the shark?

To date WildAid have successfully enlisted a number of Chinese celebrities, including basketball player and China's most well known sportsman, Yao Ming, and film star Jackie Chan in promoting awareness via mainstream media, including on state TV.

The impact of the methyl mercury found in all shark products and the

irreversible, neurological damage it can have, as well as the use of industrial grade hydrogen peroxide to process shark fins, are also becoming better known.

But no matter how compelling the evidence about finning, or the questionable nutritional value of shark fin soup, the question remains whether sharks can mobilise opinion in the same way more appealing animals such as the panda can?

Without better understanding, it's all too easy to think of sharks in the same way we do other species such as blue fin tuna, so loved by sushi eaters. No doubt if the soup was made from dolphin dorsal fin or panda ears, the campaigners' success would be a *fait accompli*. Indeed, even when the Global Shark Attack File, which reports the significance of shark/human interactions, shows we are more likely to be killed by an electric toaster than a shark; the 'witch hunt' hysteria surrounding the recent shark attack-related death of a German tourist in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, is telling. We are scared of sharks and that makes it easier to justify both their indiscriminate slaughter, and our errant ability to ignore the consequences of our actions.

Antonia Quirke, author of the British Film Institutes' book 'JAWS' believes that the impact of Stephen Spielberg's film on our collective psyche cannot be underestimated: 'Jaws provided us with an unforgettable series of images of the jaws of a shark: the clearest signifier of death there is. We can be bitten by a spider, trampled by an elephant, stung by a jellyfish, mauled by a bear, gored by a bull, constricted by a python but we are EATEN by a shark. The sharks' teeth represent (literally) the physical gates to the next world. We seek to punish sharks because they are the very incarnation of our fears.'

While hundreds of millions of sharks were killed in the last two years, only around 80 shark attacks

on humans were reported - with only 3 deaths worldwide. Dr Erich Ritter, who runs a shark school for divers, at the Red Sea Diving Safari in Egypt, says: 'No other animal is connected to so much erroneous information and portrayed in such a wrongful manner as the shark. Sharks are not dangerous; it's the situations which humans either knowingly or unknowingly create, or [which] are triggered by a third party. The wrongful attitude towards these animals among the general public has to change. But it's not human nature to protect what they fear, and it is this fear which has to be eliminated. The true animal has to be shown and when people are aware, they will realise that these animals have nothing in common with the image portrayed in the media and movies.'

Thankfully, while efforts to better educate the public about sharks are still piecemeal, what we already know is very revealing. Contrary to received wisdom, sharks have a similar brain to body mass ratio as mammals, and are more social than we care to admit, possessing not just curiosity but powerful problem solving skills.

The ReefQuest Centre for Shark Research have observed sharks near Smitswinkel Bay, South Africa working together to move a partially beached dead whale to deeper waters to feed, as well as Porbeagle sharks engaged in playful activities and repeatedly chasing an individual shark trailing a piece of kelp behind it.

And revealing their intrinsic beauty remains the mission of Belgian photographer and conservationist, Jean-Marie Ghislain: 'I never forget that we have to pay respect and that we are in their territory but once you understand their psychology and adopt the right behaviour, you can safely share their waters. Many of the sharks I have swum with were so beautiful and playful I almost forgot I was with sharks.'

Climate catastrophe



In a remarkable photo essay **Mohammad Rakibul Hasan** documents the lives of some of those struggling to survive on Bangladesh's climate change frontline





The world's climate is changing. This poses a significant risk for developing countries. These countries and many NGOs are lobbying to receive climate funds from western nations. It seems like a race for every 'victim' country to try and prove they are the greatest victim of climate change. Bangladesh is one such victim of global warming. The coastal belt of the country, along with that of

India and Myanmar, has become a flashpoint for sudden cyclones and tidal floods. These coastline areas, particularly in Bangladesh and India, have huge populations who are the principal victims of these natural disasters. The increase in cyclones in the region could be down to the changing climate. Shatkhira is a coastal district of Bangladesh. Cyclones 'Sidr', 'Aila', 'Layla' and 'Nargis' all hit this place in recent years and resulted in a massive loss of life, as well as

displacing many people. These are the world's 'climate refugees', having to move to nearby districts or Dhaka city. Climate funds from overseas cannot settle these refugees properly unless corruption within government, corporations and NGOs is addressed. The fate of Bangladesh's climate refugees is predictable: misery. It seems to be a silent genocide.



Bangladesh's coastal communities have suffered as a result of climate related natural disasters.

Photos in this collection were largely taken in Shatkhira District and Dhaka City in 2010.

www.mrhasanphotography.com





Bangladesh's coastal regions are increasingly hostile environments for those that live and work in the region.



CLIMATE CHANGE



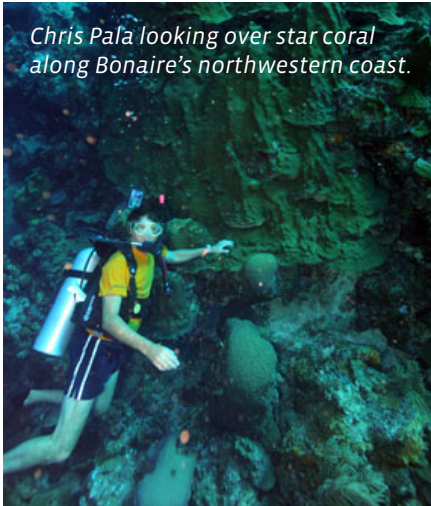


Communities are struggling to adapt to the changing climate.

The often-flimsy buildings are no match for the cyclones that have become a constant threat to Bangladesh's coastal regions.







Chris Pala looking over star coral along Bonaire's northwestern coast.

Bonaire: the last healthy coral reef in the Caribbean

Over the past 30 years, the Caribbean's corals have been decimated by overfishing, disease and pollution. Last Summer's heat spell raises the question: can the remaining corals survive global warming? The answer may lie in Bonaire, home to the region's healthiest corals, says **Chris Pala**

The giant star coral seems to appear out of nowhere as we swim slowly along Bonaire's northwestern coast about 12 metres below the surface. Standing seven metres tall on a steep slope, it is a deep, rich green, shaped like a pile of Darth Vader helmets, each with an overhang under which lurks a metallic-red squirrelfish or a dainty damselfish. All around us, soft corals and sponges rise like bushes in shades of purple, ochre and green while aquamarine parrotfish nibble at algae. Andrew Bruckner, a coral biologist leading an intensive survey of Bonaire's reefs, waves at me to emphasise the star coral's size and raises a thumb to indicate how healthy it is. 'This is one of the last places in the Caribbean where you can see really big star corals,' says Bruckner, the chief scientist of the Washington-based Living Oceans Foundation, after we get to shore. 'That one is probably 600 to 800 years old.' An estimated 60 per cent of the Caribbean's living coral cover has disappeared in the last 30 years. But Bonaire has only lost 30 per cent. 'Bonaire's reefs are in better shape than any Caribbean island by far,' says Bruckner. 'The big question is why?' This year, he and a team of nine scientists carefully measured the health of corals and the density and diversity of fishes and relationships with algae and other invertebrates. 'If we can figure out

why Bonaire is in such good shape, we can give other Caribbean islands the tools they need to bring back their reefs before they disintegrate.'

Bonaire's luck

There are some immediately apparent contributing factors: Bonaire is a flat, coralline island that gets little rainfall, so runoff of dirt, a known killer of corals, is minimal. No hurricane passed the island for virtually all of the 20th century. When Captain Don Stuart arrived in Bonaire in the 1970s to set up one of the first recreational diving businesses, he remembered elk and stags were so thick he had to dig a channel from the beach just to allow his divers to reach deeper waters. Elsewhere in the Caribbean, the reefs were already far from pristine. The first Spanish colonists wiped out many of the turtles and manatees that grazed on algae and kept intact the reef's system of checks and balances that allowed the corals to flourish. After World War II, mass-produced masks, fins and spear guns allowed fishermen to quickly wipe out the large groupers, snappers and parrotfish that held the ecosystem in balance. 'People depend too much on fish in the Caribbean,' notes fisheries expert Daniel Pauly. Unlike the coral atolls of the Pacific or the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean islands are high and the dropoff is relatively steep, so there isn't much shallow water for corals, most of which

live symbiotically with algae that depend on sunlight. 'The populations are large and the reefs are small,' he adds. 'The tourism industry pays a premium for the big fish and the local people take the small ones to survive.'

Saved by tourism

Alan Friedlander, a marine biologist who studies both the Caribbean and the Pacific, says, 'Every region has suffered from overfishing but the Caribbean has been more affected than any other.' In Bonaire, the clear water and the profusion of corals created a virtuous circle: when recreational diving developed around the world, Bonaire became one of its magnets, in part because the most spectacular areas are within a hundred metres from shore. There is no need for boats here. The income brought in by the free-spending divers drew the autonomous government of this Dutch colony to severely restrict fishing (and ban spear-fishing entirely) so there are still more reef fish here than in any other large island in the Caribbean. Today, diving is the island's the main source of outside income. While Bonaire's reefs prospered, in the rest of the Caribbean, the last check on algae - coral's natural competitor for habitat - was a species of algae-eating, long-spined sea urchin called diadema antillarum. That was virtually wiped out in 1982 by a disease that was never identified. The result was the

rapid transformation of many of the region's reefs from coral-dominated to algae-dominated; the first large ecosystem on Earth to suffer such a decline. There are only about 60 species of corals in the Caribbean today, compared to over 300 in the Indo-Pacific. Scientists believe that this low number contributed to the decline and to the spread of coral diseases.

But Bonaire was special. 'When I started here in '95, the reefs still looked much like the first detailed descriptions we got in the 1950s,' says Friedlander. 'There were still some locations with healthy stands of elk and stag in the first seven metres, then in the next 12 metres down you had dense aggregations of massive star corals, and in the deepest areas (20 to 40 metres) the bottom was carpeted by giant sheets of lettuce coral.'

At the time Bonaire's coral was similar to other islands except Jamaica, Hispaniola and Florida, which had already lost most of their corals. Today, says Bruckner, virtually all of the elk and stag have died, leaving fields of rubble of sand and broken branches. In the next layer, the smaller star corals are still largely intact, while the lettuce coral has significantly declined because of disease and bleaching. Only a few of the giant star corals remain.

The culprits for the most recent massacre are two-fold. In 2005, a spell of hot weather caused 80 percent of the Caribbean's corals to force out the microscopic symbiotic algae that provide them with food and colour, leaving them white. The phenomenon is known as coral bleaching. If the water doesn't cool down, within a few months, the corals die. Around 40 per cent of the remaining Caribbean corals died that year. Bonaire, however, suffered less than other areas. The second cause is the diseases that tend to follow bleaching and kill the corals that survived it. 'We know that in the past 3,000 years, there has never been the kind of mass losses of elk and staghorn coral from disease that we've seen

since the late 70s,' says Bruckner. On the next dive, Bruckner points to other star corals that are half green, half brown, separated by a whitish line. That's white plague disease, which in a matter of weeks can kill a coral that took decades or centuries to grow. He gives a thumb-down: the coral head will probably die. But on many other similarly sick coral heads, he points to little lumps of live coral on the dead, brown parts; thumb up instead.

Back on the pebble beach, Bruckner takes off his mask and explains. 'What we're seeing here is a reef that's suffered some disease but is still reproducing, which means that new coral colonies are able to settle on the dead corals' skeletons.' That, he says, is because there are enough algae-grazing fish, such as parrotfish and surgeonfish living in the reefs, to nibble off the algae growing on the dead coral, leaving it open for coral polyps to settle. As a result, the diseases are having less of an impact than elsewhere, which indicates the corals are more resistant. 'We don't know why,' shrugs Bruckner.

Climate-change resilient

What really intrigued the scientists was that the juvenile corals that settled on the skeletons of the dead ones were often different species. 'We're seeing a shift from a reef dominated by four corals – stag, elk, star and lettuce – to one with dozens of species,' says Bruckner. 'The big question is whether this

new pattern is going to be more resistant to climate change.' The summer of 2010 was exceptionally warm in the Caribbean, particularly at the intersection of the Greater and Lesser Antilles. Bonaire was less affected. Over in St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands, marine biologist William Miller says last summer's hot spell and bleaching was the second most lethal to corals in his 25-year work in the region. 'The 2005 event was worse, it bleached 90 percent of our corals and killed 60 percent,' he says.

Between October 2009 and August 2010, the water was above the bleaching threshold, he said. Only Hurricanes Earl and Omar churned up the water enough to bring the shallow temperatures down. The fact that both events occurred within five years suggests that they could become more common. A 1998 event devastated much of the Pacific but there the recovery rate is much faster, in part because there are more reef fish and more species of coral.

For the long term, Bruckner is optimistic. 'The historical record shows corals are pretty adaptable,' he says. 'If we can restrict fishing and pollution and create more marine reserves, I think we can save some of the Caribbean's coral reefs. But even if we don't, in places like the remote Pacific islands, I think the more vulnerable coral species will die off and be replaced by tougher ones. I just don't see them dying off completely.'



The Caribbean has lost 60 per cent of its coral reef over the last 30 years or so. Bonaire has only lost 30 per cent.

Contaminated eggs: industrial farming leading to dioxin-type food scares

In the latest food scare of its kind eggs were found to contain potentially dangerous levels of dioxin.



The latest food scare - the contamination of British eggs with the cancer causing chemical dioxin - can be linked to our reliance on complex food chains and industrial production methods, report Joanna Blythman and Tom Levitt

When you read the word 'eggs' on an ingredient listing, it doesn't start a red light

flashing. And why should it? Most people assume that any eggs used are British. We envisage careful employees, working in a small, clean factory with a daily supply of nice, fresh eggs from nearby happy hens, patiently cracking eggs as required for each new production batch. If only that was the case. The latest food scare over dioxin-containing eggs illustrates how even apparently straightforward ingredients used in processed foods are often not what they seem. In fact, they are a wriggling can of worms. We now learn that it is standard practice in the food industry to use a product known as liquid pasteurised egg. What is this exactly? You will be forgiven for not being entirely sure because it's not something you'll have in your domestic larder.

What happens is that producers of eggs, usually from caged, factory-farmed hens, sell their eggs to a company that shells them and subjects them to a very high heat. This process kills off any potentially harmful food poisoning bacteria, so it may sound like a good thing, but it isn't, because the heat also destroys several of the vitamins that make eggs so nutritious. In truth, the real reason for this treatment is not public health, but manufacturers' convenience and profit. Once pasteurised, the eggs are transformed into a long-life product, like sterilised milk, that can be stored at room temperature for use by them over a period of months, or even years. To be fair to manufacturers, they are under pressure from the food hygiene establishment to use this denatured

ingredient, since the regulations governing the use of fresh, raw eggs are so absurdly demanding and strict that they act as a disincentive to use them.

Complex food chains

This telling egg contamination incident sheds light on how common food processing ingredients have become international commodities, bought and sold on a global market. The dioxin-contaminated eggs came from Germany where the hens had been fed oils designed for refining into biofuels. From there, the eggs were sent hundreds of miles to Holland for treatment, then transported by sea and road to two companies in Cornwall and Cardiff, which in turn supplied supermarkets.

When it comes to products contaminated with illegal substances, the further suspect ingredients travel, the more opaque the food chain is and the longer it takes the regulatory authorities, spanning several countries, to track down the problem and coordinate a response. To make matters worse, as smaller food manufacturers have gone to the wall, unable to jump to the supermarket buyer's tune, more of our food is manufactured in a few centralised factories to ensure economies of scale, and distributed by a handful of powerful retailers.

The irony here is that thanks to our increasingly globalised food chain, although it can take weeks for the authorities to pinpoint the source of a problem and tell us which foods are affected- 3 weeks in the case of eggs- the rogue ingredient can contaminate thousands of products on our shelves in a matter of days. More than likely, we will have eaten them before the regulatory authorities have even woken up to the problem.

Dioxin-contaminated eggs are no different from previous food contamination incidents, such as antibiotic nitrofurans in prawns

in 2002 and the infamous Sudan 1 dye, an industrial dye used in floor polish and solvents, which found its way into convenience foods like pasta sauces and ready-meals in 2003. They have in common obscure, illegally-used ingredients that had originated thousands of miles from these shores, all of them known carcinogens.

In the case of dioxin-contaminated egg products, true to form, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) parrots its familiar mantra that they pose 'no food safety risk'. But since when did digesting potent poisons and pollutants become good for us? This kneejerk tendency to sooth our legitimate fears underlines, once again, how the FSA is ludicrously laid-back about health risks posed by both legal and illegal food ingredients with widely-known adverse effects, and cannot be relied on to fight the nation's public health corner.

Of course, one-off, atypical food contamination incidents can occur anywhere. But if our supermarkets paid food manufacturers a price that would allow them to source their ingredients via a local, regional or at least national supply chain, then the links in that chain would be fewer and more transparent, and any problem could be sooner identified and tackled. Likewise, a more vigilant, pro-active FSA would keep manufacturers on their toes.

Cheaper animal feed

The convoluted, lengthy supply chain is lunatic but only one part of the problem. Food manufacturers are turning their back on British eggs and using lower grade ones from overseas because it enables them to cut their production costs and make some profit on ruthlessly tough supermarket contracts. And for the same reason large-scale industrial pig and poultry units are driven to find the cheapest possible animal feed to lower their production costs.

The biggest food health-scare of

the 1990s BSE originated from contaminated animal feed, as did the foot and mouth outbreak in the UK in 2001. Likewise, so did the two most recent dioxin food scares in Belgium in 1999 Ireland in 2008. In the latest scare in Germany, industrial fat added to pig and poultry animal feed as a supplement was found to contain levels of the carcinogenic dioxin 70 times more than safe levels. Dioxins, a byproduct of the chemical industry, are accumulating in the environment and the fatty tissues in our bodies, mainly through the consumption of food where levels have built up in animals and plants. Although they have no immediate effect on our health, prolonged exposure to high levels of dioxins is known to cause cancer and damage to our immune and reproductive systems.

Campaigners have called for greater focus in cutting out dioxin contamination produced by chemical companies but worry in the meantime that our drive for cheap animal feed and food is pushing us towards potential health scares. Pig and poultry farmers in particular are pushed to find ways to minimise the costs of animal feed that make up more than 50 per cent of the cost of production.

'The temptation to find cheaper ways [to feed the animals] is inevitable,' says Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) chief policy advisor Peter Stevenson. 'But this endless attempt to produce cheaper and cheaper food is dangerous and one aspect of our industrial food system that can occasionally blow up in our face.'

Officials in Germany are pushing for stricter controls on the production of animal feeds to prevent contamination but that may not stop future health scares. Stevenson and others argue Europe should be using farm subsidies, currently under review, to promote more local and sustainable agricultural systems not reliant on complex trading networks.

Environmental Investigation Agency: meet the original eco spooks

The EIA has been at the forefront of investigative campaigning for over 25 years, tackling the illegal wildlife trade, timber trafficking and ozone-depleting CFCs. **Matilda Lee** gets a debriefing

The 1989 worldwide ban on ivory trade through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) was a conservation success story, brought about after the discovery of an ‘elephant holocaust’ which saw the slaughter of 2,000 African elephants a week over a ten year period.

The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), at the time a fledgling investigative campaigning group, infiltrated the powerful and dangerous billion-dollar crime ring fuelling the trade. It filmed evidence of dead elephants with tusks removed, of factories where ivory was made into trinkets, and the blood trail that connected the two. EIA’s film was crucial in getting decision makers to acknowledge just how bad the problem was, and, more importantly, ensured they couldn’t ignore it.

Detailed in the book *To Save an Elephant: the undercover investigation into the illegal ivory trade*, the EIA’s first big profile campaign shows how, through dogged commitment, a small group of people exposed a poaching ring so extensive it boggled the mind how or why the big wildlife conservation groups could ignore it. In one scene, founders Allan Thornton, who last month gained an OBE for services to protect the environment, and cameramen Dave Currey and Clive Lonsdale were undercover in a Dubai warehouse. Thornton used stalling techniques while the cameramen, attempting

to gain a view over a wall into the next warehouse, were hoisted up by forklift in a cardboard box in which they had cut holes big enough to stick a lens through. They filmed container after container of ivory tusks and workers using band-saws to carve them. Drenched in sweat, they made a narrow escape after being spotted.

Environmental crime

EIA’s bold exploits may have fuelled the fantasies of a new generation of ‘eco detectives’, but its achievements in preventing crime over the last 25 years have more to do with a careful and cool-headed plodding of the day-to-day. ‘We look at a problem and work back’, says Mary Rice, the Executive Director for the past 3 years (pictured below). ‘We do road mapping and strategic planning on a quarterly basis. We may have a three year goal, but how we get there may change according to external circumstances. We try and achieve incremental steps along the way.’

Unfortunately for the EIA, environmental crime - from the trade in tiger bone, Grizzly bear parts and ozone depleting substances, to illegal fishing and logging - thrives best in countries where, due to lack of political will, financial means or corruption, enforcement is weakest. As the criminal syndicates they are up against get more and more sophisticated, so do the EIA. To bolster their desk research, they

employ state-of-the-art software to map the details of criminal networks; on the ground they use the latest in GPS, mobile phone and satellite mapping technology.

Tools and tactics

EIA investigators ‘come from all walks of life, biologists, scientists, journalists. One of our investigators is an ex-British policeman’ says Mary. I ask about going undercover; how do they avoid jeopardising the evidence, and... getting caught? ‘We never pay any money for information, we never buy any goods, we present ourselves as buyers - and we film it. People talk. You’d be surprised how much people talk. Investigators have a skill in leading the discussion and asking the right questions. It’s about developing trust. You have to build up that relationship over a period of days or weeks.’ Whether or not you put your life at risk is, according to Mary, ‘very much left to the discretion of who is actually at the front of the investigation. If at any point they are uncomfortable or they think there is a risk, then we withdraw.’ They’ve had a few close calls. In January 2000, EIA campaigner Faith Doherty was kidnapped while investigating illegal logging in Indonesia by timber baron Abdul Rasyid. She and an Indonesian colleague were beaten and threatened for two days, before being safely released.

Full disclosure

The EIA's work naming and shaming applies equally in the murky criminal underground as in high-level diplomatic circles. Fresh from the Tiger Summit in Russia, Debbie Banks, head of EIAs Tiger Team, says the EIA is the 'independent eyes and ears' which will make sure words (in this case a political declaration to double world tiger population by 2022) is matched with action. If it's not, they'll have 'something to hit them over the head with'.

Literally, this means a careful wielding of the fruits of their undercover operations to influence complex negotiations on endangered species. About Tanzania's previous attempt to downlist the CITES status of elephants in order to resume sales of ivory, Mary says, 'We are diplomatic. We met the Minister on a one to one basis before the conference and didn't make a big splash about it. He agreed to withdraw a proposal.'

On occasions when this tactic doesn't work, they are not afraid to go public with uncomfortable information, even if it makes them unpopular. 'Zambia maintained there was no elephant poaching. But we knew because of people passing information and visiting, that that wasn't the case. So we went undercover. We shared that with the UK government, the EU, the Zambian government...with all the delegates. It was key in preventing Zambia from getting a downlisting.'

'The general consensus amongst decision-makers and NGOs such as Traffic [the wildlife trade monitoring network] and WWF was supportive of Zambia downlisting. In fact, I think EIA was the only organisation speaking against Zambia,' says Mary.

Does it make you angry: the collusion, or lack of awareness of other NGOs?

'We don't understand how they arrive at their decisions when we have evidence to illustrate that



A member of the anti-poaching patrol carries ivory tusks on his head, Zambia. Photo: EIA

things are not what they appear. Sometimes it's a lonely place, you're not popular, people don't like to be caught. Often the people representing countries know nothing about it, it's embarrassing.'

No compromise

They may not have the clout of the big wildlife protection NGOs, but because EIA has made a strategic decision not to grow beyond a certain size (aside from the UK office, they have an office in Washington DC) they can be targeted and react very quickly. They can also say things that others can't.

'If you find damning information in a particular country, your ability to articulate that can be compromised if you had an office in that country,' says Mary. As the demand for illegally traded wildlife continues to grow in the Far East, wouldn't an office in China help? She chuckles, 'Well if we had one, we couldn't shout at the Chinese government'. Many campaigns are on-going, such as their first on Pilot whaling (see image of carcasses in Leynar Bay,

Faroe Islands above). Potential new campaigns are weighed carefully through 'scoping exercises'. Mary says they are currently looking into illegal e-waste and illegal fishing, though both would require more resources and personnel.

In the last year, the demand for rhino horn in Vietnam and China has led to a doubling in rhino poaching in South Africa. Mary's clearly got an itch to scratch. 'What they've discovered is the methodology of the poachers is very sophisticated. They are using helicopters, they are darting the animals with a tranquilising drug used by vets. The level of investment in targeting one animal demonstrates quite clearly that it is worth doing. All of this is making its way to the Far East. At the moment, there is nobody really looking at that issue - we'd like to but we don't have the resources. It probably requires a well-planned, strategic campaign and consumer end investigations. Also it's very, very dangerous.'

www.eia-international.org

Emily Apple: 'I can't forgive Mark Kennedy's betrayal of activists'

The undercover policeman's apology does not repair the lives he has wrecked or help the people he has grassed up, says **Emily Apple**

Along with many others, I was sickened when I discovered that the man I knew as a fellow activist, Mark Kennedy, was in fact an undercover police officer who had been spying on us since 2003. Yet my feelings were nothing compared with those who were close to him. The betrayal and loss they are feeling is a real grief – the equivalent of someone you love dying. I went through this myself a few years ago when one of my best friends, Martin Hogbin, was exposed as a BAE spy. I denied the facts for a long time simply because the truth was too difficult. I still miss my friend, miss the good times, miss him seeing my son grow up; I don't think this feeling will ever go away.

Unfortunately, this is something those of us labelled domestic extremists have to deal with. We know our movements are routinely infiltrated; it's more a question of "who" than "if". This awareness of betrayal, and suspicion of our fellow activists, is always with us. Indeed, part of the disruption that undercover operatives cause is

making people doubt each other and their motivations. Most activists have at some point discussed those they suspect in their midst. Often suspicions are unfounded and only shared among close friends, but this paranoia effectively disrupts protest planning.

I knew Kennedy from gatherings and protests – we were both involved in environmental actions, anti-fascism and international mobilisations. He wasn't a close friend, but a familiar face I knew and trusted. The last time I saw him was at the Earth First gathering in August when he came to a meeting about how to best oppose the English Defence League (EDL) in Bradford. He was vocal there but, in retrospect, very keen on diverting the discussion away from mass mobilisation in the city centre and concentrating on targeting the coaches the EDL would be using.

It has already been pointed out that this could be seen as provocation. Kennedy was openly and actively promoting illegal activity – suggesting people either damage or obstruct the vehicles. However,



Undercover police operative, Mark Kennedy.

I believe his motives went beyond provocation. The police were most afraid of a major public order incident in Bradford. By suggesting the coaches, Kennedy had an ideal way of not losing face in terms of action, at the same time as trying to keep people away from the city centre.

This manipulation and disruption of protest is the undercover operatives' main focus, and defines the overall strategy of protest policing operations. For example, overt police surveillance tactics at Kingsnorth – carried out by their forward intelligence team – were praised in a National Policing Improvement Agency report for providing "good intelligence and disruption". Subtle manipulation ensures an action is implemented in a way that suits the policing agenda without people feeling their actions have been compromised.

Disruption can take many forms, from asking questions about whether a group has the capability to carry out their plans, and thereby undermining confidence, to spreading rumours and smears



Activists are now worried that there may be more undercover police currently operating within protest circles. Photo by MiniMouse

about key activists in order to cause dissent within and between groups. These are all tried and tested methods, and in the words of Officer A, who admitted his role as a “hairy” for the Special Demonstration Squad in the Observer last year: “Once the SDS get into an organisation, it is effectively finished.”

Since being exposed, Kennedy has said he’s sorry, and has acknowledged that what he did was ‘really wrong’. But saying sorry does not repair the lives he has wrecked, help the people he has grassed up, or reinvent the actions he jeopardised and manipulated. Personally, I read his statement as nothing more than an attempt to deflect the anger rightly directed towards him, and add to the

confusion he has already caused. Nor is there any proof that he was really prepared to assist the protesters who faced charges of conspiracy to commit trespass at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station, as he has since claimed. Meanwhile, Kennedy’s alleged remorse dominates the media coverage when we should be exploring how the deep and complex anti-activist policing operation works, and what can be done to stop it. The implications of this case are endless. For those closest to Kennedy, the questions will never be answered. They will always wonder about him, just as I will always wonder about Martin, always doubt my memories, question what, if anything, about our friendship was genuine. None of us will ever know what information

was passed on, or which actions were compromised. We can spend endless hours speculating, but there will never be closure. But one thing is certain: Kennedy was not alone, and there will be many more revelations of this kind over the coming years. With militant action building on the streets, the police will be seeking to infiltrate and disrupt prominent groups in any way they can. However, the Kennedy affair has also shown the strength of activists’ support networks. We have been able to offer care and solidarity to those most affected: if we can maintain this, we will continue to be strong.

Emily Apple is the co-founder of Fitwatch, and a writer, activist and mother, living in Cornwall