

## Save Silent Valley as a World Heritage Site?

Our country is heading towards an ecological disaster in threatening the last area of tropical rain-forest remaining on the Indian subcontinent. Its planned disappearance would deprive future generations of much of our special heritage of unique flora and fauna—probably including the endangered Lion-tailed Macaque (*Macaca silenus*) and the vulnerable Nilgiri Tahr (*Hemitragus hylocrius*) and Nilgiri or John's Langur (*Presbytis johnii*).

During 1979 and 1980, numerous labourers and technicians, on behalf of the Kerala State Government, carried out a commercial slaughter of much of Silent Valley, shattering many of its natural habitats for the purpose of establishing a hydroelectric project on the River Kuntipuzha (Palghat District) in the Western Ghats of India, with the object of generating 120 MW of electricity.

The Governments of India and of Kerala State should work out an alternative project in Kerala to look after the future needs for power—such as, possibly, a hydroelectric project on the Barapuzha River with the cooperation of Karnataka State. Indeed it has been pointed out by the experts of the Department of Science and Technology of the Government of India, that this might serve the electricity needs of the Malabar region better than the Silent Valley project. Unfortunately, the Kerala High Court has dismissed petitions seeking to forbid the State Government from executing the Silent Valley hydroelectric project.

As is well known to readers of *Environmental Conservation*, the world's tropical moist forests are currently disappearing at an alarming rate; indeed if the present rate of deforestation continues, the majority of the remaining primary tropical forests will have disappeared within a few decades. Yet tropical forests are important sources of fuel-wood, food, and building materials, and also help to stabilize water supplies and prevent soil erosion. Moreover, the destruction of tropical forests would result in the extinction of a very considerable proportion (that in some estimates ranges as high as 20%) of the world's species of plants and animals. Many of these species contain further potential for new medicaments, industrial products, and genetic materials to maintain high agricultural productivity.

Tropical forests also harbour much valuable knowledge concerning traditional medicine, forestry, ecology, and other fields of biology, while there is disturbing evi-

dence to indicate that their large-scale loss could bring about major and irreversible changes in the global climate.

Increased efforts in tropical forest conservation, sustainable management, and research, are proving encouraging but still inadequate in view of the magnitude of the problem. Moreover, these activities often suffer from a lack of information on particular tropical forest problems and what is (or is not) being done to solve them. So crusading efforts are urgently needed to protect the areas of primary tropical forests that remain—including (and perhaps particularly) any on the Indian subcontinent.

In all these circumstances it is of vital importance that what remains of Silent Valley should be preserved and established as a World Heritage Site under the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage. Such sites can only be proposed officially by a country which is a Party to the World Heritage Convention.

The outstanding merits of Silent Valley for inclusion in the World Heritage List are:

1. It represents what is widely considered the ultimate stage of the Earth's evolutionary history.
2. It represents significant ongoing geological processes, biological evolution, and Man's interaction with his natural environment.
3. It shelters some unique and superlative natural phenomena, being the last of such tropical rain-forests on the Indian subcontinent, and an area of exceptional natural beauty.
4. It is a habitat where populations of rare and endangered species of plants and animals still survive.

Silent Valley thus qualifies to demonstrate an array of features of global significance. If INSONA's plea is considered favourably by the Government of India, Silent Valley could have the special distinction of being India's first World Heritage Site to find a place in the United Nations List of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves, and, with this, the status of one of the world's protected areas, moreover upholding the wise use of natural resources.

G. M. Oza, General Secretary  
Indian Society of Naturalists (INSONA)  
Oza Building  
Salatwada  
Baroda 390 001, India.

## China Joins the International Whaling Commission

The World Wildlife Fund and its scientific advisers, IUCN, recently praised the decision of the Peoples' Republic of China to accede to the International Whaling Convention. 'We believe China's decision could be a decisive factor in the deliberations of the International Whaling Commission in 1981', commented WWF International's Chairman, Sir Peter Scott. 'We warmly welcome the prospect of another voice for conservation at the next IWC meeting. China is becoming a leading new factor in world conservation, and this is a move which we anticipate will favourably influence the voting of other nations in the Commission', he added.

IUCN's Director-General, Dr Lee Talbot, described the decision as 'giving us renewed hope for the future of whales, which include the largest animals ever to exist on

Earth. 'Whales have become the symbol of international environmental concern, and consequently it is particularly fitting that China, with her immense significance to international conservation, should take this step'.

The Chinese Government's decision to join the IWC was conveyed in a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hung Hua, to the United States' Secretary of State, whose country is designated as a depositary under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling, which was drawn up in Washington in 1946.

David Mitchell, Director of Public Affairs  
World Wildlife Fund (WWF)  
Avenue du Mont-Blanc  
1196 Gland, Switzerland.