

Notes & News

Names of newly discovered species to be auctioned for MPA-related conservation

Looking for new ways to raise funds for your MPA? If so, take note of "The Blue Auction", occurring 20 September in Monaco. The event will sell the rights to name several species of fish discovered during surveys of the Bird's Head Seascape region of Indonesia. The surveys, conducted in 2006, were part of an ongoing initiative to establish ecosystem-based management in the region, including designation of MPA networks (*MPA News* 8:4).

Proceeds from the auction will go to fund the initiative, which is a partnership of Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, WWF-Indonesia, local and national governments, and local NGOs.

For sale are the naming rights to each of 12 items: 10 endemic species of fish as well as a patrol vessel and a future research expedition in the region. The high bidder for each fish species will gain the right to provide the species name in Latinized form. Suggested starting bids for the fish range from US \$45,000 for a species of rainbowfish, to \$500,000 for a unique shark species that crawls on its pectoral fins. Suggested starting bids to name the patrol vessel and the future research expedition are each \$200,000.

The Bird's Head Seascape region encompasses an area of 180,000 km² and more than 2500 islands and submerged reefs. In May 2007, the Indonesian government designated a network of seven MPAs, totaling 9,000 km², in one archipelago of the region (*MPA News* 8:11).

The Blue Auction will be held at the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco. More information is available at www.theblueauction.com.

Guide available for MPA practitioners on ecological gap analyses

A new report offers advice on analyzing gaps in conservation coverage for use in planning MPA networks. Featuring brief case studies from four nations (Ecuador, Grenada, Jamaica, and Palau) and best practices learned to date, the guide serves as an introduction and overview to ecological gap analyses. "An ecological gap assessment is the basis for developing a clear vision of the scope and future direction of [a] protected area system," states the report. "[The] assessment can be a compelling, science-based framework that ensures that a protected area network is truly viable and representative."

The 21-page report, *A Quick Guide to Conducting Marine Ecological Gap Assessments*, is published by The Nature Conservancy and is available in PDF format at <http://conserveonline.org/workspaces/patools/resources/gapassessment/gapdocs/marinegapquickguide>.

Funding available for coral reef conservation

Pre-applications are due 6 November 2007 for the NOAA International Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program, operated by the International Program Office of the (U.S.) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The program provides grants to international, governmental (except U.S. government agencies), and non-governmental entities working to conserve coral reefs. Grants for fiscal year 2008 are available in four categories:

- Promoting watershed management;
- Enhancing regional MPA management effectiveness;
- Encouraging development of national MPA networks; and
- Promoting regional socioeconomic training and monitoring in coral reef management.

Country eligibility varies by grant category, and proposed work must be conducted at non-U.S. sites. For details on categories and eligibility, go to <http://nosinternational.noaa.gov/coralgrants.html>.

Research spotlight: Paper finds loss of coral cover in Indo-Pacific

A paper in the August 2007 edition of the online journal *PLoS ONE* reports that live coral cover in the Indo-Pacific region has declined significantly over the past two decades — from a region-wide average of roughly 42% in 1984, to 22% in 2003. Live coral cover is the percentage of a reef that consists of live coral, and is a key measure of reef habitat quality and quantity. Authors John Bruno and Elizabeth Selig of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (U.S.) analyzed more than 6000 quantitative surveys of Indo-Pacific reefs performed since 1968. The Indo-Pacific encompasses three-quarters of the world's shallow-water coral reefs.

"Climate change is certainly a primary cause of the decline," says Bruno. "But there are several other equally important factors including outbreaks of disease and *Acanthaster* (crown-of-thorns starfish), sedimentation from poor land usage, and destructive fishing practices."

He and Selig acknowledge the rate of loss could be exaggerated by the possibility that early reef surveys focused on high-cover reefs and subregions (i.e., the most spectacular coral sites), whereas recent surveys may be more comprehensive in sampling. Still, Bruno says, the decline is too significant to be explained by sampling bias alone. The decline was even found on some of the Pacific's most intensively managed and researched reefs, including in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

"Quality of management is paramount in mitigating local threats, like sedimentation and destructive fishing," says Bruno. "However, I am not surprised that managers have been far less successful in battling

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