

Dear supporters and friends,

Welcome to spring (almost)! Like all of you, we're hoping for more normalcy this year, including travel and fewer headaches for our field partners.

Ongoing meetings with field partners to review progress and firm up plans and budgets for this year give us confidence in progress made and the year ahead.

Meanwhile, website design improvements have been made to much of [the website](#). And another way to stay in the loop is to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). We've been taking care to bring compelling "content" – that is, great photos and videos that bring alive some of the best work of our field partners.

New projects

Philippines: Protecting a Manta Ray Cleaning Station

Manta ray cleaning stations are essential habitats for reef manta rays, as they are the "day spas" where rays regularly go to be cleaned by cleaner fish and crustaceans. An oceanic current that runs over the cleaning station enables rays to hover over the station, giving the cleaners as much time as needed to remove parasites and necrotic material from wounds. Only two such cleaning stations were previously known in the Philippines, both of which received protection. In 2018, a third reef manta ray cleaning station was discovered in Northern Palawan. Despite a ban

following the devil ray's CITES listing in 2017, illegal bycatch and targeted catch continue, resulting in population decline. ICFC is supporting a study and community outreach by the Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute (LAMAVE) that will be used to establish a community-led, science-based marine protected area.



A young elephant explores Kitum cave in search of salt. Photo: MEEP

Mount Elgon Cave Mining Elephants

The elephants that frequent the slopes of Mount Elgon (Kenya's second highest mountain) are the only known elephants in the world that go deep into caves—up to 150 m—in search of salt. Amazingly, they do this in the pitch dark, and they have done so for thousands of years. These "salt mining" elephants use their tusks to expose salt deposits on the walls of these ancient volcanic caves. Unfortunately, this unique population faces threats due to increasing pressure from the surrounding communities. Encroaching agriculture cuts across the elephants' travel routes, leading to crop raiding and posing a serious hazard to both humans and elephants alike. In fact they have been wiped out completely on the Ugandan side of the mountain. Our aim, working with the East African Wild Life Society and Mount Elgon Foundation is to reduce human-elephant conflict. We're tackling this through daily patrolling and tracking by community scouts, educational outreach in collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Service, and a beehive fence pilot project. (Elephants fear bees! So beehives deter them from crossing into farm plots.) [See video!](#)



Mobula rays.
Photo: Duncan Murrell

New projects, continued

Laos Asian Elephant project

ICFC has partnered with Association Anoulak, whose focus is protection of the 4,000-km² Nakai-Nam Theun National Park in the Annamite Mountain Range. This is one of the largest remaining contiguous forest blocks in the Indochinese peninsula and has been ranked at the highest priority for its national and global biodiversity importance in Laos. In 2008, the Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Project created a 450-km² reservoir that flooded the core habitat of the resident elephant population on the Nakai Plateau. The elephants and other large vertebrates are also impacted by overhunting. With ICFC support, Association Anoulak will survey the elephant population on the Nakai Plateau and surrounding areas using a non-invasive genetic sampling method (dung!). This will yield information on the population's size, genetic diversity and social structure for use in drafting a conservation action plan for the long-term monitoring and conservation of this species.



These red-shanked doucs were captured by camera traps in Laos. Photo: Association Anoulak

And from the political realm ...

The UN **Biodiversity Convention of the Parties (COP-15)** that had been scheduled for April 25-May 8 in Kunming, China is now postponed, with a new starting date of August 29.

In recent months, Anne has taken part in meetings with government ministers and their staff as part of the **Green Budget Coalition**, which provides input into federal budgets. The two sets of recommendations ICFC leads on are international climate finance and assistance to developing countries for biodiversity conservation, including protection of Canada's migratory birds and their wintering habitats.



Andre in the field in the South Pacific country of Vanuatu, where he did his PhD work. Photo: Presley Dovo

New ICFC staff: Andre Boraks

We were very pleased to have Andre Boraks join the team last September as Director of Programs and Data. We asked him to introduce himself and, well, he really wanted to talk more about fungi! Here's his account:

I'm a mycologist with a keen interest in spatial ecology. Toadstools are always the first thing to come to mind when we think of fungi. This certainly aligns with my earliest memories of fungi, dating back to when my grandmother would make soup from the wild mushrooms that grew in our forest. I now know that the mushrooms we harvested represented a tiny fraction of the rich diversity of fungi that are found among all natural environments.

Fungi shape our everyday existence. They play a major role in the global carbon cycles, are used for industrial and pharmaceutical manufacturing, and are employed in culturally important contexts around the globe. Despite their importance, we know very little about fungi. Fungi outnumber plant species by a ratio of 10:1. Mycologists have described < 10% of the estimated 5 million species. It's an odd thing to know so little about these ubiquitous and integral components of our ecosystems.

The last several months at ICFC have been a steep learning curve of all the fantastic conservation work that is being done around the globe. It has been very rewarding to work with our field partners on a diversity of approaches to biodiversity conservation. ICFC recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to biodiversity conservation. Every day I'm humbled by the dedication and passion of our field partners.

Andre lives in Halifax with his wife Alice and three small boys.

Your ongoing support makes a difference!

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