

WIN-WIN

When WWF, the global conservation organization, was looking for a symbol at its beginnings in 1961, it opted for the giant panda because it was highly endangered and instantly recognizable. Now the panda is finally making something of a comeback, thanks to reforestation.

The panda depends on bamboo forests: each eats 12 to 38 kilograms of bamboo each day and a breeding pair needs at least 30 square kilometres of forest to sustain it. Any forest loss – through logging, road construction or urban expansion – can spell catastrophe.

Since 1998, the Chinese Government has worked closely with WWF and other organizations to preserve forests – and in 2004 a survey found 1,600 pandas, a 40 per cent increase since the 1980s.

This is largely thanks to 50 new nature reserves, and ‘green corridors’ which act as bridges between the panda habitats that had been turned into green islands by roads, farms and cities. Thus two large panda populations were recently linked by a 200-hectare green corridor created by putting a national highway in a tunnel.

The Chinese Government has pledged to restore another 1,275 square kilometres of forest, helping pandas and also securing wetlands, forests, arid areas and the habitat of the snow leopard.



Michel Gunther/WWF-Canon



Jason Kian Hwa/UNEP/Topham

TREES in the

FREDERICK OLMSTED, creator of New York’s Central Park, called it ‘the lungs of the city’. He was right. Green spaces aren’t just pleasant retreats in the concrete jungle, but living organs vital to urban health.

A city’s ‘green infrastructure’ filters pollutants from water before it gets into rivers, reduces the amount of

Beijing, China

As it prepares to host the 2008 Olympics, Beijing has planted over 800,000 trees in its 680-hectare Olympic Forest Park, in the north of the city. Designed to evoke traditional Chinese ‘mountain-water’ art, it will include an enormous artificial mountain and a 122-hectare Olympic lake, as well as carefully chosen native plants and animals. After serving as a venue for tennis and other sports, the Park will provide a quiet refuge and clean air for the congested city.

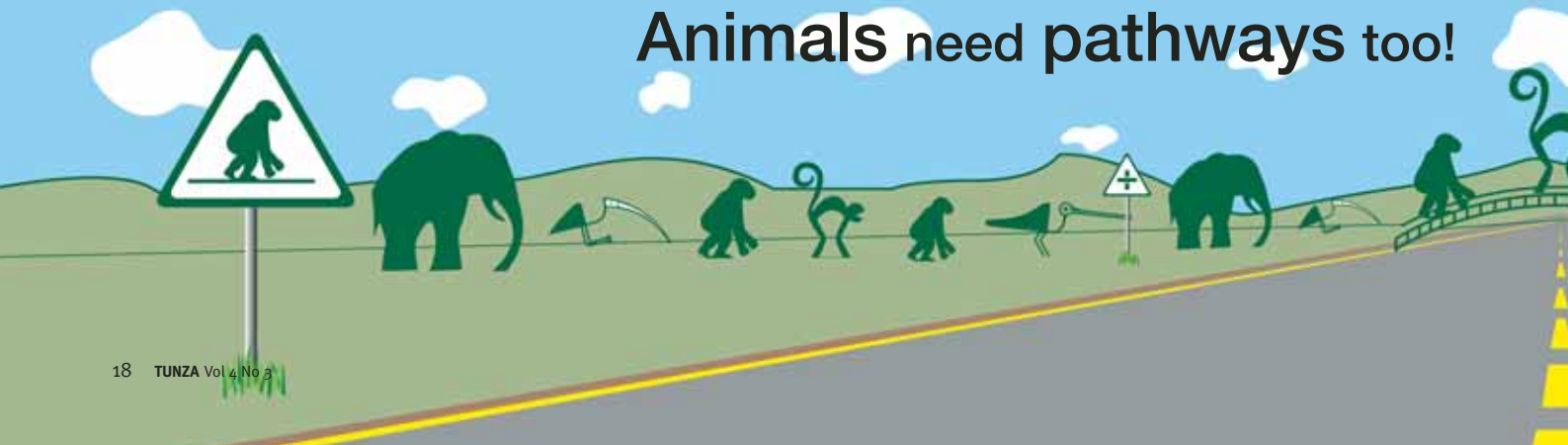
Barcelona, Spain

The best view of Barcelona is from the Parc de Collserola, an 8,000-hectare oasis of pine, oak and bubbling springs in the mountains bordering the city. The city established it in 1987, since when Barcelona’s parks and gardens have doubled, while its streets now also boast 150,000 flourishing trees.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The 3,300-hectare Floresta da Tijuca is the world’s largest urban forest, providing habitat for many rare and endemic

Animals need pathways too!





concrete jungle

water washed out by storms, oxygenates the air, cuts energy use by shading buildings, and absorbs carbon dioxide and other gases. Urban forests lower the temperature of the city, which is normally higher than in the surrounding countryside. And, of course, they provide recreational space and wildlife habitat.

species. But by 1844 it had been so degraded by coffee and sugarcane cultivation that the city's water supplies were threatened. Within 12 years, Manuel Gomes Archer, the forest administrator, had replanted 72,000 native Atlantic rainforest trees, restoring it almost single-handedly.

Nairobi, Kenya

Only 2 per cent of Kenya is still forested, so the 600-hectare Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary in Nairobi is a particularly precious resource. While providing a carbon sink and stabilizing the water table, it hosts 190 species of birds and more than 300 species of plants. Its many insects and arachnids are still being catalogued.

Louisville, Kentucky

The Jefferson Memorial Forest, 25 kilometres from the city centre, is – at 2,400 hectares – the largest city forest in the United States of America, and was originally established in 1946 as a tribute to Kentuckians killed in the Second World War. Hikers, campers and picnickers enjoy its oaks, ferns and wildflowers, as well as its many birds, including great blue herons and horned owls.

Championing the EARTH

Just downstream from Manaus, in the heart of the Amazonian rainforest, the giant Amazon and Negro rivers meet – creating one of the most extraordinary sights on Earth. The black waters of the Negro meet the muddy brown ones of the Amazon, but do not mix, running beside each other for 8 kilometres downriver until they finally mingle.

This July, their meeting point witnessed an equally remarkable event. The Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, Bartholomew I, two Roman Catholic cardinals and other religious leaders joined an indigenous shaman to bless the waters. Brazil watched on live television as the shaman – wearing a headdress of parrot and heron feathers, and carrying a spear and a sacred rattle, performed an ancient purification ritual – followed by blessings from the Christian leaders.

It was an extraordinary act of reconciliation and joint commitment, for the indigenous people of the Amazon were persecuted, and largely exterminated, after the arrival of Christianity.

Now top Christians were coming to learn from them, as part of the sixth of a series of floating environmental symposia convened by the Patriarch, dubbed the 'Green Patriarch'.

One of the Patriarch's most senior colleagues, Metropolitan John of Pergamon, summed it up: 'We are here to ask ourselves why it is that the indigenous people have managed to protect the environment better than we have been able to do. Let us listen with respect to cultures which have managed to survive the zeal of our ancestors who conquered them almost to the point of extinction.'



Nikos Manginas

Let's help them build bridges...

