

framework and direction for actions and investments to protect it in future. Since the start of the year-long project in April 2003, a draft Country Study describing the state of the nation's biodiversity has been developed, and wide stakeholder engagement is under way. As part of this process, FFI staff facilitated a national workshop for the development of the biodiversity strategy. The event was well attended and positively received, and augurs well for the process of participation in biodiversity planning.

FROM LITTLE ACORNS...

It is a little known fact that Mexico has the greatest number and diversity of oak species in the world. Of the 500 species in the northern hemisphere, an estimated 150 are found in Mexico. Over half of these occur nowhere else. Some 36 Mexican oak species are listed as globally threatened, and many have great ecological, economic and cultural importance. Their conservation is an urgent global priority.

As part of its Global Trees Campaign, in partnership with the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens in the UK and the University of Puebla in Mexico, FFI is aiming to produce a Mexican Oak Conservation Strategy with specific and targeted activities for each of the endangered oaks and their habitats. With the support of the Flagship Species Fund and International Tree Foundation, the study initially focused on *Quercus insignis* (an impressive flagship oak with egg-sized acorns) and *Quercus hintonii* as priority species, and is now moving on to work with the Critically Endangered *Quercus hinckleyi*. For each species, environmental and ecological characteristics are used to map a predicted distribution that is tested with subsequent field visits. Collected acorns have been used to start a number of small-scale local nurseries with partners in universities, botanic gardens and herbaria in Puebla, Xalapa, Huatusco and Veracruz.

The data collected by the team will be disseminated locally through partner institutions and educational material, and internationally via the Global Trees Campaign website. A planned workshop on Central American oak species at the University of Puebla will bring together representatives from key national and regional organizations as part of the consultation for a conservation strategy.

GLOBAL BAT CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

FFI has a long history of involvement in the conservation of bats, both within the UK and internationally. It first began working on bats in the 1970s when, as the Fauna Preservation Society, it was involved in drafting legislation to protect bats in the UK. In the 1980s it continued in the same vein, organizing a National Bat Year in 1986. The expansion of its international activities culminated in the publication, in 1992, of *Old World Fruit Bats – An Action Plan for their Conservation*, a review of the conservation status of around 160 species. Subsequently, work began on a companion volume for the remaining 830 species, published in 2001 as *Microchiropteran Bats – Global Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan*. Both



these plans list key recommendations for conserving the most threatened species and FFI has taken a lead role in implementing these recommendations. Through its 100% Fund and Flagship Species Fund, FFI has supported 38 projects on bats in 23 countries including Argentina, the Comoro Islands, Fiji, Greece, Indonesia, Liberia, Lithuania, Madagascar, Moldova, Romania, Rwanda and Thailand. Three current FFI staff members have extensive bat skills including surveying, educational campaigns, roost and habitat management, red listing and conservation planning.

Bats have been recognized as a key group for several reasons. With around 1,100 species of bats worldwide, they are the second largest group of mammals after rodents. They are found in all areas of the world apart from the Arctic and Antarctic regions and a few isolated islands. In many countries bats contribute significantly to mammalian diversity and in some countries they are the only native mammals. In tropical ecosystems bats play a vital part in the pollination and seed dispersal of a wide range of plants, some of which are of economic importance. It has been shown that bats can play a key role in the re-establishment of forests in areas that have been degraded. Most bats feed on insects and may help to control the numbers of pest species. Almost a quarter of the 1,100 species are threatened with extinction.

Using its in-house and regional expertise and worldwide contacts, FFI is developing a Global Bat Conservation Programme. It will establish partnerships with key individuals and organizations to develop a series of activities including information collation and dissemination, workshops, planning and on-the-ground conservation projects.

In the first year, FFI will concentrate on reviewing the Red List status of all bat species, establishing a web-based information system and initiating projects that have close links with its current sphere of activities. This will enable the rapid establishment of an effective range of projects that tackle crucial issues and to which FFI can contribute significantly. In the longer term FFI will aim to develop partnerships with other individuals and organizations to instigate key projects.