

In Case You Missed

Madagascar's New Species in Peril

Though Madagascar's flora and fauna is being exploited at an alarming rate, it does not cease to reveal divine secrets.

This week, the World Wildlife Fund Madagascar & West Indian Ocean Program Office released a new report titled: "Treasure Island: New biodiversity in Madagascar (1999-2010)", Africa Review reported.

The document highlights the incredible discovery of 615 species in Madagascar over the last decade. The new finds consist of 385 plants, 42 invertebrates, 17 fish, 69 amphibians, 61 reptiles and 41 mammals.

These discoveries will add to the island's 250,000 species ecosystem which is home to 5 percent of the world's plant and animal species, 70 percent of which are endemic to the country, say the authors of the report.

According to scientists, the island separated from the African continent some 165 million years ago and from the Indian subcontinent 80 to 100 million years ago. This long isolation from neighboring landmasses has allowed a unique array of plants and animals to evolve, including hundreds of endemics, mentions the report.

However, plants and animals, including the new finds, are in peril despite millions of dollars invested in the Africa's first National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) being carried out in the island since two decades.

Accelerated destruction of natural habitat conducts endemic species on the verge of extinction. Tiana Ramahaleo of WWF Madagascar said the country loses an average of 800 kilometers square of natural forest each year.

Ancient Thracian Residence Found in Bulgaria

Archaeologists are staging a major expedition to the south eastern slopes of Kozli Gramadi peak in Sredna Gora to investigate the only fortified residence from the era of the Odryian Kingdom in Bulgaria, the National Museum of History in Sofia said in an official press release this week.

The residence is in the village of Starosel vin Hisarya municipality, Sofiaecheo region.

The kingdom was formed by a union of Thracian tribes that lived between the 5th and 3rd centuries BC.

The territory of the Odryian kingdom included largely present-day Bulgaria spreading to parts of northern Dobruzha, parts of northern Greece and present-day Turkey.

Bulgarian archaeologists discovered the fortified residence in 2005 and in 2010 excavations were restored. The expedition started in June 1 and will last for three months.

The team of scientists headed by archaeologist Ivan Hristo includes Dr Hristo Popov from Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Daniela Stoyanova a researcher from Sofia University and Valentin Todorov from National Art Gallery, Sofia.

The scientists will have the unique opportunity to excavate the interior area of the Thracian residence, which was built during the reign of Teres I (351-341 BC).

The ancient culture of the Odryians is a curious mixture of Thracian local tradition and Greek influence. Monumental architecture and object from the dawn of Hellenic era are found in the residence.

Historical Church Uncovered In Florida

University of Florida archaeologists have discovered the foundations of what they believe is a more than 330-year-old stone church in St. Augustine.

Archaeologists explain that the find is significant as it is the oldest church of its kind in the state.

The church is estimated to have been built in 1677, and the foundation has been found on the site of the first and longest-lasting of the Spanish missions in Florida, Fox News reported.

The Church of Nombre de Dios and la Leche was built in 1677 and was greatly praised in many old documents including letters to the king of Spain.

Archeologists believe the church was about 90 by 40 feet in size, meaning it was the largest church in the Spanish colonies at the time.

St Petersburg Offering Quick Wedding Licenses

Russia's second city Saint Petersburg approved this week offering 72-hour marriage, starting from Tuesday, registration as a part of a program by the city hall to boost tourism to the country's former capital.

The five-year tourism development program approved by city hall includes more aggressive advertisement of the city, offering tax-free shopping and visa-free air and rail travel for foreigners, AFP reported.

Among the more creative initiatives is the option of rapid marriage registration between tourists, said a spokesman for the city government.

Marriage registration takes at least a month in Russia after the couple submits an application, and many registry offices are backed up with requests, especially in the summer months.

Saint Petersburg's program is supposed to raise the number of tourists to 8.1 million people annually, the spokesman for City Hall told AFP.

History of Silk Industry



>> By Sadeq Dehqan

Sericulture, or silk production, has a long and colorful history unknown to most people. For centuries the West hardly knew about silk and the people who made it. For more than two thousand years the Chinese kept the secret of silk altogether to themselves. It was the most zealously guarded secret in history.

>> Origins

Chinese legend gives the title Goddess of Silk to Lady Hsi-Ling-Shih, wife of the mythical Yellow Emperor, who was said to have ruled China in about 3000 BC. She is credited with the introduction of silkworm rearing and the invention of the loom. Half a silkworm cocoon unearthed in 1927 from the loess soil astride the Yellow River in Shanxi province, in northern China, has been dated between 2600 and 2300 BC. Another example is a group of ribbons, threads and woven fragments, dated about 3000 BC, and found at Qianshanyang in Zhejiang province. More recent archeological finds--a small ivory cup carved with a silkworm design and thought to be between 6000 and 7000 years old, and spinning tools, silk thread and fabric fragments from sites along the lower Yangzi River-- reveal the origins of sericulture to be even earlier.

In spite of their secrecy, however, the Chinese were destined to lose their monopoly on silk production. Sericulture reached Korea around 200 BC, when waves of Chinese immigrants arrived there. Silk reached the West through a number of different channels. Shortly after AD 300, sericulture traveled westward and the cultivation of the silkworm was established in India.

It is also said that in AD 440, a prince of Khotan (today's Hetian)--a kingdom on the rim of Taklamakan desert-- courted and won a Chinese princess. The princess smuggled out silkworm eggs by hiding them in her voluminous hairpiece. This was scant solace to the silk-hungry people of the West, for Khotan kept the secret too. Why share it with the westerners and kill a good market?

Then around AD 550, two Nestorian monks appeared at the Byzantine Emperor Justinian's court with silkworm eggs hid in their hollow bamboo staves. Under their supervision the eggs hatched into worms, and the worms spun cocoons. Byzantium was in the silk business at last. The Byzantine church and state created imperial workshops, monopolizing production and keeping

weavers from Constantinople. Eventually silk production became widespread in Europe.

>> Early Trade

Silk became a precious commodity highly sought by other countries at a very early time, and it is believed that the silk trade was actually started before the Silk Road was officially opened in the second century BC. An Egyptian female mummy with silk has been discovered in the village of Deir el Medina near Thebes and the Valley of the Kings, dated 1070 BC, which is probably the earliest evidence of the silk trade.

During the second century BC, the Chinese emperor, Han Wu Di's ambassadors traveled as far west as Persia and Mesopotamia, bearing gifts including silks. A Han embassy reached Baghdad in AD 97, and important finds of Han silks have been made along the Silk Road. One of the most dramatic finds of Tang silks along the Silk Road was made in 1907 by Aurel Stein.

Sometime around 1015, Buddhist monks, possibly alarmed by the threat of invasion by a Tibetan people,



the Tanguts, sealed more than ten thousand manuscripts and silk paintings, silk banners, and textiles into a room at the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas near Dunhuang, a station on the Silk Road in northwest Gansu.

>> Production in Iran

Managing director of the Khorasan Silkworm Breeding Company says the province of Khorasan Razavi along with South and North Khorasan provinces are under the auspices of the company.

"The main function of the company is to produce and distribute silkworm eggs. But whenever the government

silkworm begins. At times with the blossoming of mulberry trees in March, silkworm was produced by the end of the Iranian year. It takes about 45 days for the silkworm egg to transform into a cocoon. Harvesting cocoon in Khorasan starts in mid-May and continues until there are cocoons on the mulberry trees."

The company, he said, had started buying silkworm eggs for the current season.

"The private sector is active in the purchase of cocoons and they are bought from owners of silkworm eggs at rates higher than the (state) guaranteed prices. This year's price for every kilogram of high quality cocoon is 73,900 rials, which is 30 percent above last year's prices." He said the price of cocoon last year was 56,840 rials per kg.

Sarjam'ie said last year one-fourth of the total silkworm eggs in the country was distributed in Khorasan region. Consequently, the region accounted for one-fourth of nationwide production.

>> Some Improvement

"Last year from every box of silkworm eggs close to 30 kg of cocoon was obtained. This year the amount has increased by 1.5 kg per box. It should be noted that this year the volume of silkworm eggs distributed in Khorasan was five percent higher than last year. Last year, some 3,600 boxes of silkworm eggs were distributed in the entire Khorasan region.

"The figure this year was 3,800 boxes. Presently the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, Khorasan and Golestan are the main regions for cocoon breeding. However, it is also produced in limited quantities in other regions, namely the provinces of Fars, Isfahan and East Azarbaijan," he said.

Almost 75 percent of the silk in Iran is produced in Torbat Heidarieh region (in Khorasan Razavi) in the city of Bayeg.

There are 600 silk spinning machines in this region and cocoons are transported to this region from across the country for spinning, the official said.

An estimated 200 tons of silk is produced in the country.

"Recent history has it that Iranian silk production reached a few thousand tons per year...But as time passed the volume declined. As per figures compiled by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in 2008 Iran was fifth in the world in cocoon production. The main



the secret to themselves.

This allowed a silk industry to be established in the Middle East, undercutting the market for ordinary-grade Chinese silk. However high-quality silk textiles, woven in China especially for the Middle Eastern market, continued to bring high prices in the West, and trade along the Silk Road therefore continued as before.

By the sixth century the Persians, too, had mastered the art of silk weaving, developing their own rich patterns and techniques. It was only in the 13th century--the time of the Second Crusades--that Italy began silk production with the introduction of 2000 skilled silk

deems necessary the company buys cocoon from producers. When market conditions for cocoon are suitable, the price is determined by the market. But when prices are lower than the norm, we buy cocoons at the guaranteed rates set by the Council of Economy.

The purchased cocoon is stored in warehouses and when there is demand from silk producers, cocoon is made available to them through tenders," Farid Sarjam'ie told Iran Daily.

About the breeding and producing of silkworm, he said, "Distribution of silkworm eggs starts in early spring. When the mulberry tree blossoms, production of



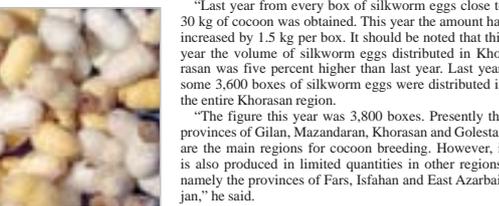
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global center for its production is China. Other rivals are South Korea, Japan, Italy, India, Russia, Brazil, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan," he said.

Import of silk by private companies had adversely affected local production of this fine product.

"Almost all of the silk produced in the country is allocated for carpet weaving. Barely one percent is used for textile weaving. It should be noted that there are no subsidiary silk industries in Iran and there are only two silk cloth weaving factories in Khorasan and Gilan. Traditional silk is woven in Kalat Naderi region of Khorasan Razavi province," he said.