

In Brief

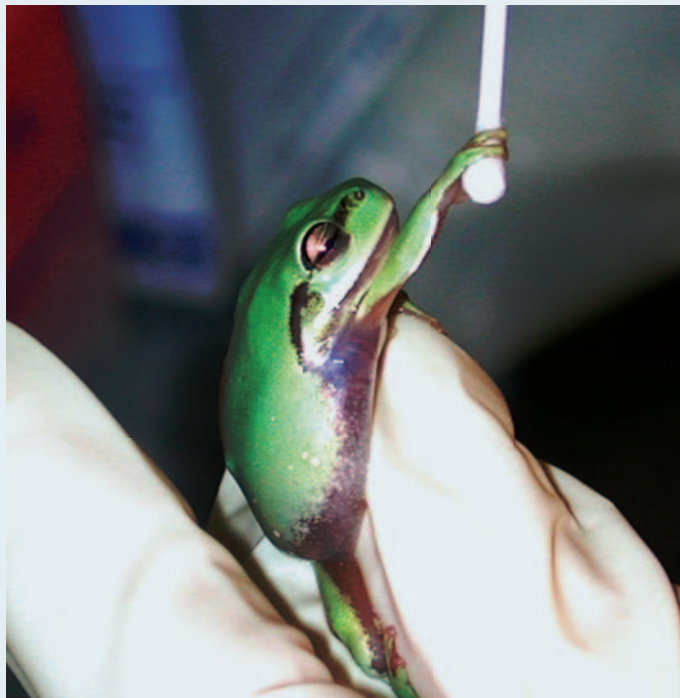
Medical fallout from extinctions

The loss of animal and plant species may also deprive humankind of future antibiotics, painkillers, anti-cancer drugs and other medicines according to a new book, *Sustaining Life*.

Medical experts from around the world contributed to the book, which includes the example of the world's only gastric brooding frog, discovered in Australia's rainforests in the 1980s. The female swallowed the fertilised eggs and hatched them in her stomach before regurgitating them as tadpoles. Researchers say the frog – which has since become extinct – could have provided insights into the treatment of peptic ulcers.

'When [such] organisms are lost, they take with them the secrets that may be the result of millions of years of evolution and that they, and perhaps they alone, contain,' said the book's co-editor, Dr Eric Chivian.

'Bioprospecting' and other benefits of biodiversity for



The world's amphibian species are disappearing at an alarming rate yet medical experts say many frog species hold the secret to future treatments. Veronica Olsen

industries such as tourism, organic agriculture, sustainable forestry and biosequestration are also the theme of 'Building biodiversity business,' published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Shell International.

The report calls for policy reforms to increase commercial rewards for conserving biodiversity, increased penalties for biodiversity loss and better information on the biodiversity performance of business.

Increased funds for reserves welcomed

WWF-Australia welcomed the Australian Government's recent announcement to increase the National Reserve System's budget from \$8 million to \$36 million a year over five years.



Reserves such as WA's Fitzgerald River National Park help protect biodiversity. Sciencelimage

WWF has been calling for a government commitment of \$50 million per annum over five years to expand Australia's protected areas system. It says national parks and reserves 'are the proven best and most secure method of arresting declines of threatened wildlife toward extinction and buffering nature against climate change'.

Budget incentives to save water

As part of its 2008–2009 budget, the Australian Government has announced a \$1.5 billion urban water plan that includes rebates on domestic rainwater tank or greywater system installations. Rebates of up to \$500 each will be available for 500 000 homes over six years.

The rebates are part of a \$12.9 billion, 10-year nationwide water plan – 'Water for the Future' – which includes \$10 billion already allocated to the Murray–Darling. Of that \$10 billion, \$3.1 billion will be set aside to purchase water that will be returned to Basin waterways. A further \$5.8 billion is available for rural



The government has allocated funds to provide rainwater tank rebates of up to \$500. Richmond Tank Works

water projects that help secure a more sustainable future for irrigation regions and return water to rivers.

GM Holden leads GM supply-chain greening

GM Holden – GM's Australian subsidiary – is partnering with the World Environment Center (WEC) to make its automotive supply chain more sustainable.

Seventeen suppliers of GM Holden have signed up to the WEC's 'Greening the Supply Chain' program. 'The aim of the GM/WEC partnership is to demonstrate the ability to achieve specific, measurable results that improve competitiveness across the supply chain through the application of sustainable development practices,' said WEC's President and CEO Terry Yosie.

GM Holden had already installed an energy monitoring

system at its Fisherman's Bend plant to improve the efficiency of furnaces and compressed-air distribution systems. It had also reduced water consumption per engine produced by almost 40 per cent between 2002 and 2007.

The WEC program has already been adopted by car-makers and other manufacturers in Mexico, Brazil, Romania and China, where, according to the WEC, significant energy efficiency and water conservation improvements have been reported.

www.wec.org/news/gm-holden-to-green-its-supply-chain/