Business acting for biodiversity: CEMEX and BirdLife's plans for biodiversity spring into action

Title
With a backdrop of huge industrial machinery that is shadowed by the walls of a Mexican quarry, a group of people are chatting and bustling about in the morning sun. With binoculars in hand, they trace the dawn songs of desert birds and dash over to wildlife tracks that they spot in the sandy soil. Together, these conservationists and aggregate-industry employees start today?s record of the unique flora and fauna found in the area.

?We even found mountain lion tracks? and a Long-eared Owl swooped overhead. Now we better understand how we can improve site management for these species,? said CEMEX Conservation Expert Alejandro Espinosa Treviño.

Named Cerrito Blanco, this quarry which is nestled within the highly-biodiverse Western Sonora desert in north-west Mexico, is one of six operational pilot sites identified worldwide by the multi-national cement and aggregates company, CEMEX, where priority conservation action has begun. This marks an important progression for the CEMEX-BirdLife International global partnership, which aims to have plans for biodiversity in place at all high priority sites by 2015.

After just a few biodiversity surveys at Cerrito Blanco, CEMEX Mexico have already recorded 65 bird species in surveys with the collaboration of national conservation organisation, Pronatura (BirdLife Partner in Mexico), and other local stakeholders; and other sites are steaming even further ahead with conservation plans, particularly in the UK and Spain.

In 2010, CEMEX together with BirdLife International launched a pioneering assessment of biodiversity at all 543 of their cement and aggregate sites across the world (see scoping study article). This CEMEX - BirdLife Biodiversity Scoping Study included the use of a satellite mapping system to identify the sites most in need of conservation attention, based on their proximity to areas of high biodiversity value. Half of these sites are close to protected areas, Important Bird Areas, Key Biodiversity Areas and Natura 2000 sites; and in 70 of those sites there is an opportunity to enhance biodiversity management. From these, CEMEX and BirdLife identified twelve sites as areas where conservation efforts should be focussed first, Cerrito Blanco being one of these priority sites.

The Scoping Study also yielded maps and databases that detail the biodiversity features at all of CEMEX?s global operations. The blueprints were laid; the next step was to develop and refine the right tool for CEMEX to carry out these action plans for biodiversity.

CEMEX set a new standard for Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs)

December 2011 marked the unveiling of this tool: the CEMEX-BirdLife Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Guidance. A BAP is a document that provides a standard framework for identifying, protecting and enhancing biodiversity at a site, including stages for biodiversity surveys, people engagement and sustainable site management.

The whole BAP process encourages CEMEX country operations to coordinate with local BirdLife Partners for conservation expertise, and raises conservation awareness amongst CEMEX staff and local people who are associated with a site. CEMEX ? BirdLife Partnership Manager, Charlie Butt, added:

> *?Often the BAP is an exciting opportunity to not just protect wildlife near a site, but enhance it too - something very clear to the CEMEX employees in Cerrito Blanco who frequently encounter wildlife during everyday operations.?*

Following the unveiling of the BAP Guidance, CEMEX chose one key site from each of CEMEX?s global regions, meaning four BAP Pilots have been launched in 2012 - with two additional pilot sites in UK and Spain launched in 2011 and already at an advanced stage.

> *?The BAP was a major step in the right direction for meeting CEMEX?s on-going challenge of managing biodiversity at all our sites around the world, particularly the ones where biodiversity risks and opportunities are greatest,? said Vicente Saiso, Vice-President, Corporate Director of Sustainability at CEMEX. ?We?re delighted to have seen the BAP progressed at all of the six pilot sites during 2012, with the majority being undertaken in partnership with BirdLife Partners.?*

Progress on the ground

Bordered by patches of riverine forest and connected by marsh vegetation, CEMEX?s Soto Pajares gravel pit near Madrid in Spain is intimately associated with an Important Bird Area (IBA).

Machinery extracts over 1 million tonnes of aggregate annually, yet a year?s biodiversity surveying has recorded bird species like Sedge Warbler, Water Rail and Red-crested Pochard living in and around the quarry site.

Some of these species are of ?special conservation interest? locally, including those mentioned above; and also recorded were regionally threatened species that are vulnerable to habitat disturbance such as Western Marsh-harrier. With the BAP well underway, biodiversity will benefit from the creation of shallow lakes due to gravel extraction, forest restoration and work to increase the extent and connectivity of marsh vegetation. CEMEX Spain cooperated with SEO/BirdLife (BirdLife in Spain) and another NGO, Grupo Naumanni, for the initial wildlife assessments and for recommendations to ecologically enhance the quarry and IBA in this on-going process.

In the UK, the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) is already collaborating with CEMEX UK for biodiversity conservation across the business, and the South Ferriby Cement Plant & Quarry currently documents progress through stage six of their BAP. The company?s extensive network of quarries provides an exciting opportunity for wildlife

habitat creation.

In Branton, England, CEMEX UK successfully converted a former CEMEX mining site into a 29 hectare nature conservation area; now the general public have access to come and enjoy nature there first-hand.

Business and biodiversity

The year 2007 marked the signing of the 10-year partnership between BirdLife and CEMEX, a company with a reputable environmental conscience. Conservation work continues at CEMEX?s flagship conservation initiative, El Carmen, a huge and biologically diverse wilderness reserve that they manage in north-east Mexico. This includes support for research projects and awareness-raising for conservation in the area. CEMEX realises that for a professional long-term business the provision of building materials is not sustainable indefinitely without respect and mindfulness of biodiversity.

> *?We are at an exciting stage in our relationship with CEMEX,? said Jonathan Stacey, BirdLife?s Working with Corporates Senior Programme Manager. ?Developing biodiversity action planning through collaboration with BirdLife Partners in such places as Mexico, Malaysia and the Dominican Republic, to name some examples, is shifting a paradigm of engagement for both CEMEX and BirdLife.?*

> *?Developing practical and participatory approaches to sustainability must become mainstream in all sectors of society. We are now seeing a growing trend in the integration of sustainable values, ensuring that business takes full account of biodiversity and that traditional conservationists better understand the needs of business.?*

In October 2011, CEMEX UK received the Natural England Biodiversity award for habitat creation efforts undertaken in partnership with RSPB at Rugeley quarry in Staffordshire. CEMEX voluntarily avoided quarrying the site to maximum permitted depths to ensure that the area could be converted into a lowland dry heathland ? an international priority habitat recognised under the UK?s commitment to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Moving forward

It?s dusk at Cerrito Blanco quarry and CEMEX workers watch a desert spiny lizard scurry into hiding when they cut the engines of their machinery. Nearby, CEMEX and Pronatura surveyors put away their binoculars and clipboards as they finish recording biodiversity for the day. The next stages of the BAP will be rolled out at this pilot quarry in Mexico, as worldwide, CEMEX and BirdLife start working hard to establish BAPs at over one hundred priority active CEMEX sites that are within or near to high biodiversity value areas. BirdLife?s CEO, Marco Lambertini said:

> *?These pilot projects are a significant milestone in our partnership with CEMEX. We look forward to building on them for biodiversity and further strengthening our relationship with CEMEX in the coming years.?*