



Welcome to the IUCN Species Survival Commission

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Introduction

Welcome to the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC). You have been invited to join an international network of experts that makes up the largest of the six IUCN volunteer Commissions. The structure and functioning of IUCN and SSC may appear complex at first, so this introductory document has been compiled to provide you with a clear overview of both.

The Species Survival Commission was established by IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, in 1949. Since that time, the SSC has grown into a global, science-based network of thousands of volunteer experts, working together towards achieving the vision of

“A just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to reduce the loss of diversity of life on earth”

The major role of the SSC is to:

- Provide information to IUCN and the wider world on the conservation of species and on the inherent value of species in terms of ecosystem health and functioning, the provision of ecosystem services and the provision of support to human livelihoods; and
- Promote the conservation of species, thereby leading to measurable reductions in the loss of biodiversity.

Collectively, SSC members form a highly-regarded and influential network of species experts that is able to influence conservation outcomes at all levels, particularly international, through engaging with each other and collaborating in both the IUCN's and SSC's name.

The SSC undertakes assessments of the status of species, develops species conservation action plans and strategies, prepares technical guidelines and formulates IUCN policy statements. The Commission delivers and promotes this technical knowledge, advice and policy guidance to those who can influence the implementation of conservation action across the world. The major role of the SSC Red List Authorities is to contribute status assessments of their species to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, in collaboration with Global Species Programme (GSP) staff in the IUCN Secretariat, and often in partnership with other organisations (such as BirdLife International, Conservation International, NatureServe, and the Zoological Society of London).

The strength behind the SSC is a worldwide network of volunteer experts who donate their time and expertise to build a scientific and practical foundation for the effective delivery of conservation. The thousands of volunteer experts are organized into Specialist Groups (SGs), Red List Authorities (RLAs) and Task Forces (TFs) arranged taxonomically, thematically and/or regionally, and convened by the SSC in response to pressing conservation issues.

Joint vision, goal and objectives of the SSC and IUCN Species Programme

The work of the SSC is guided by the Vision of:

***A just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to
reduce the loss of diversity of life on earth.***

The overriding goal of the Commission is:

The species extinction crisis and massive loss of biodiversity are universally adopted as a shared responsibility and addressed by all sectors of society taking positive conservation action and avoiding negative impacts worldwide.

Main strategic objectives:

For the intersessional period 2013–2016, the SSC, working in collaboration with members, national and regional committees, other Commissions and the Secretariat, will pursue the following key objectives in helping to deliver IUCN's "One Programme" commitment:

1. Assessing and monitoring biodiversity

To assess and monitor biodiversity and inform the world about the status and trends of biodiversity, especially at the species level, thus providing measures for the health of our one and only biosphere;

2. Analysing the threats to biodiversity

To analyse and communicate the threats to biodiversity and disseminate information on appropriate global conservation actions;

3. Facilitating and undertaking conservation action

To facilitate and undertake action to deliver biodiversity-based solutions for halting biodiversity decline and catalyse measures to manage biodiversity sustainably and prevent species' extinctions both in terms of policy change and action on the ground;

4. Convening expertise for biodiversity conservation

To provide a forum for gathering and integrating the knowledge and experience of the world's leading experts on species science and management, and promoting the active involvement of subsequent generations of species conservationists.

More information is available in the [IUCN Species Programme Strategic Plan 2013–2016](#), available on the IUCN Species website, which outlines 36 Key Species Results and a set of measurable targets for achieving the above strategic objectives.

Leadership structure of the SSC

The Chair of the SSC is elected by IUCN Member governments and non-governmental organisations at each World Conservation Congress and heads the Commission for the four year intersessional period between Congresses. The SSC Chair also serves as a member of IUCN Council, which is the governing body of the organisation. For the 2013-2016 intersessional period, the SSC Chair is Dr Simon Stuart, based in Bath, UK. The Council of IUCN has appointed a Deputy Chair of the SSC to support the Chair. The current Deputy Chair is Dr Jon Paul Rodríguez, based in Caracas, Venezuela.

The Chair is also supported by a Steering Committee, which advises the Chair and provides strategic vision and direction to the work of the Commission. The Steering Committee members are appointed by the Council of IUCN on the advice of the Chair. Details of the current members of the SSC Steering Committee are given [here](#) on the IUCN Species website. Certain members of the Steering Committee also serve as focal points for Sub-Committees. There are currently eight SSC Sub-Committees:

- IUCN Red List Committee - oversees and guides the work of the SSC on biodiversity assessments, including strategic responsibility for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ and the implementation of agreed priorities;
- Standards and Petitions Sub-Committee - ensures the maintenance of the scientific standards of the Red List, and rules on petitions made against species listings;
- Invertebrate Conservation Sub-Committee - seeks to enhance the SSC's work on invertebrates;
- Plant Conservation Sub-Committee – seeks to enhance the SSC's work on plants;
- Marine Conservation Sub-Committee – seeks to enhance the SSC's work on marine species;
- Freshwater Conservations Sub-Committee – seeks to enhance the SSC's work on global freshwater species and associated issues;
- Species Conservation Planning Sub-Committee – seeks to enhance the SSC's work on effective species planning deriving from the SSC guidelines “Strategic Planning for Species Conservation”
- Policy Sub-Committee – seeks to enhance SSC activities relating to policy, multilateral agreements and intergovernmental fora.

Working with the IUCN Secretariat

The SSC is institutionally linked to the GSP, which is one of several IUCN thematic programmes. The GSP is responsible for supporting the activities of the SSC's Specialist Groups, Red List Authorities, and Task Forces, as well as SSC-wide initiatives. The GSP forms part of the IUCN Secretariat and is based in IUCN's international headquarters in Gland, Switzerland, from where staff work on overall management of the Programme, SSC engagement, data management, communications and finances. It also has a number of units based in Cambridge, UK, including the Red List Unit (RLU) and the Freshwater Biodiversity Unit (FBU), and includes staff working on climate change, GIS, biodiversity systems, conservation planning and European assessments.

The GSP also has a Marine Biodiversity Unit (MBU) and Biodiversity Assessment Unit (BAU) located in Virginia, USA, and a small team working on invasive species in Nairobi, Kenya.

SSC members may also work directly with IUCN Regional and Country offices. Working in conjunction with the IUCN Secretariat (including Regional and Country Offices and thematic programmes) and IUCN Members (governments and NGOs), the SSC is committed to contributing to the delivery of IUCN's 2013–2016 programme (please see the [Species contact guide](#) for relevant a staff members to contact).

The work of the Species Survival Commission

Specialist Group contributions to IUCN

The IUCN Global Species Programme and SSC rely on the Specialist Group and Task Force Chairs to ensure that the work of IUCN is based on cutting-edge conservation science. This is achieved by, among other things, identifying emerging conservation issues and opportunities, providing innovative solutions to species conservation issues and engaging (through the SSC and the GSP) in higher-level analyses of species conservation by integrating data from various SSC SGs/TFs and other IUCN Commissions.

Specialist Groups and Task Forces are regularly asked to contribute information for IUCN's technical inputs to international treaty work including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and numerous regional agreements pertaining to species. Input from SGs/TFs is mostly in the form of comments on agenda items, listing proposals, resolutions, matters pertaining to the sustainable use of species within their remits, or other substantive issues. IUCN or SSC may also call upon SGs/TFs to contribute expert information for global, regional or national biodiversity assessments in addition to indicators of the status and sustainable use of species.

Specialist Groups and Task Forces have the capacity to be extraordinarily effective in these fora but need to maintain a clear view of their primary conservation interest and IUCN policy. IUCN policy includes the Resolutions and Recommendations approved by its Members at every World Conservation Congress, as well as various programmatic and operational policies approved by the Council. The latest set of Resolutions and Recommendations that were approved at the 2012 World Conservation Congress can be viewed on the IUCN website.

Contributing to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant, fungi and animal species. It uses a set of criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species and subspecies (IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria (version 3.1)). These criteria are relevant to all species (except micro-organisms) and all regions of the world. With its strong scientific base, the IUCN Red List is recognised as the most authoritative guide to the status of global biological diversity. The overall aim of the Red List is to convey the urgency and scale of conservation problems to the public and policy makers, and to motivate the global community to reduce species extinctions. The SSC provides much of the data

for the Red List through its network of Red List Authorities in each Specialist Group, and sometimes Stand-alone Red List Authorities, many of which are strongly supported by the GSP.

The GSP has developed the Species Information Service (SIS), an online software programme, to manage the Red List assessment information process: from data collection, to assessment and finally to publication on the public website. GSP staff and many Specialist Groups are using SIS for inputting data to the Red List and the GSP has also trained both staff and SSC members to use this tool to carry out key taxonomic, regional and global assessments (on-going training – using online training tools and dedicated workshops – is also provided to many other interested individuals). Please contact the Red List Unit for more information: redlistunit@iucn.org.

Contributing data for Red List assessments

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ is widely acclaimed as the IUCN's flagship product. It is highly recognized, widely used and universally valued by all manner of users. The services of SGs in providing Red List assessments are one of their most valuable contributions to IUCN. One of the most concrete and predictable tasks of an SG is providing information on species and conducting assessments of their status using the [IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria](#) and associated guidelines. SG Chairs should be familiar with the process and requirements for regularly updating the IUCN Red List.

With the increased documentation requirements for the Red List, SSC Red List Authorities need to plan carefully and organize means of fulfilling this function in an effective and timely way (see the [Rules of Procedure for Red List Assessment Process](#). GSP staff provide guidance on the process and timing for conducting and submitting assessments. The process of collecting species data was standardized in 1994 when the new IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria were introduced. Depending on the availability of resources, the SSC responds to requests to improve the capacity of RLAs to complete Red List assessments, through targeted training in applying the Red List Categories and Criteria and using the SIS. In some cases, where a global or regional biodiversity assessment project covers species for which an SG is responsible, the SSC is also able to provide financial resources to assist RLAs in the process of assessing their species for the IUCN Red List. Such global or regional assessment initiatives are coordinated by staff in the GSP or by staff in IUCN's Red List Partner organisations (e.g. BirdLife International).

Thanks to the knowledge and dedication of SSC's volunteer members, coverage is now complete for a number of major taxonomic groups including, mammals, amphibians, birds, horseshoe crabs, conifers, cycads, freshwater crabs and crayfish, lobsters, mangroves, reef-building corals, seagrasses, groupers, wrasses, sturgeons, and sharks and rays.

Species Conservation Strategies (formerly Action Plans)

The SSC Conservation Action Plan series has been one of the world's most respected sources of information on species and their conservation needs. Since the mid-1980's, the SSC has published more than 60 Action Plans for some of the world's most charismatic species. These were compiled by many of the Commission's 130 Specialist Groups that comprise nearly 8,000 species experts from around the world. These Action Plans represent a significant body of knowledge on their respective species, some of which are conservation icons and some of which were rarely considered for conservation priority at the time.

The resulting amount of conservation action has varied hugely between plans and this led the SSC to develop a new process that would be better able to link science and management. This was completed in 2008 under the name "[Strategic Planning for Species Conservation: A Handbook](#)" outlining a multi-stakeholder approach to conservation planning for species.

The Handbook describes when a Specialist Group should proceed with developing a Species Conservation Strategy (SCS), as these Action Plans are now named, recommends who should be involved and provides guidelines on how they should be created. Specialist Group Chairs should refer to the Handbook from now on when wanting to proceed with a range-wide species conservation strategy. A number of new SSC-endorsed conservation plans are now expected in coming years. The Species Conservation Planning Sub-Committee provides support and additional information on species planning – for more information see [here](#).

Technical guidelines

Various technical guidelines produced by the SSC provide guidance to specialised conservation projects and initiatives, such as re-introducing animals into their former ranges, handling confiscated specimens and halting the spread of invasive species. All policy statements and technical guidelines are available [here](#) on the IUCN Species website in English, French, Spanish, and sometimes other languages. There is also an online toolkit of '[Members Resources](#)' on the IUCN Species website, which includes information on developing publications, using the media and fundraising.

Providing technical advice rather than advocacy

IUCN has a diverse, unique and worldwide membership of governments and NGOs, thus taking particular care to provide objective conservation science to decision-makers, seeing itself and its Commissions as being "policy relevant" not "policy prescriptive". While this approach may be viewed as overly conservative and methodical, experience over the years has shown that it can often be very effective in achieving successful conservation action for species.

Specialist Groups and Task Forces have a pivotal role as technical advisors in helping IUCN address complex and controversial conservation issues, drawing on specific expertise to provide sound, scientifically rigorous and unbiased information. Many Groups have been drawn into advocacy roles in support of the taxa within their remit. As an SSC member, and therefore representative of IUCN, care should be taken to ensure that all approaches are made with integrity and credibility and acted through the appropriate IUCN channels. Undoubtedly there will be grey areas here and the SSC Chair's Office or the GSP can be contacted to provide helpful advice and guidance.

Structure of the SSC membership

The Commission's strength and relevance comes from its network of experts who volunteer their time and expertise to produce the scientific and practical foundation on which the effective delivery of conservation is built, both within IUCN and beyond. The bulk of the volunteer network is deployed in approximately 130 Specialist Groups, Red List Authorities and Task Forces, which are the main working units of the Commission and provide the breadth of expertise and

commitment that drives the SCC towards achieving its objectives. These Groups are unique blends of individuals who operate independently, but are committed to SSC's vision, mission, objectives and policies, and to those of the IUCN.

Specialist Groups may be organized by taxonomic group, theme, geographic area, and/or around conservation themes or disciplinary issues such as wildlife health, re-introductions, sustainable use, invasive species and conservation breeding (click [here](#) for a list of all these Groups). Red List Authorities coordinate and manage the species Red List assessment process and submission. The majority of Red List Authorities lie within the relevant Specialist Groups. However, there are a small number of Red List Authorities that are not attached to any particular SG and are known as Stand-Alone Red List Authorities. Task Forces differ from Specialist Groups in that they are convened in response to pressing conservation issues and aim to deliver on agreed outputs within a finite time frame.

Where it is believed that their effectiveness can be enhanced, some Specialist Groups are co-managed with SSC partner organizations (e.g. several groups are co-managed with Wetlands International). Co-managed SGs should maintain a regular dialogue with these partner organizations. In return, SGs can expect appropriate acknowledgement and support for their activities from the partners.

Roles and Responsibilities of SSC members

Specialist Groups and Task Forces, comprised of conservation scientists and practitioners, monitor the status of species within their remit, identify threats to these species, and prioritise and promote necessary conservation actions at all levels. They also provide scientific advice to conservation organisations, government agencies and other IUCN members, and support the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements like CBD, CITES and CMS. The SSC is widely known for its issue-related work carried out by its disciplinary Specialist Groups such as on conservation breeding or the re-introduction of species.

Individual members of SSC's groups may be researchers, government officials, wildlife veterinarians, zoo and botanical institute employees, taxonomists, marine biologists, protected area managers and species experts who conduct research and implement a range of conservation activities in the field. Through its Specialist Groups, Task Forces and Stand-alone RLAs, the SSC builds the collective capacity of its members, enhancing their ability to respond to the challenges facing the conservation of biodiversity. Reciprocally, through the SSC members have a direct link to the major international conservation fora, such as CBD and CITES, in which IUCN plays a key role, and also the opportunity to connect and collaborate with colleagues working on similar issues around the world. Such linkages enable individual members to contribute more effectively to combined conservation actions globally, as well as in their own region, country and locality.

On appointment by the SG/TF Chair or Stand-alone RLA, all members should receive a copy of this "Welcome" document and should confirm their willingness to accept in writing to the Chair. Chairs hold sole responsibility for group governance and oversight, and SSC members must clearly understand and agree to such a governance structure at the time they are appointed.

The major responsibility of SSC members is to maintain contact with their Chair and respond in a timely manner to requests that help the SSC to pursue its objectives in a timely manner. For example, this may include contributing to reviews of draft SSC technical guidelines and CITES

listing proposals, or providing other species conservation advice and tools such as training and workshop materials. The SSC also requests the services of RLAs in providing Red List assessments of the species within their remit. This is one of the most valuable contributions to the SSC and members are asked to familiarize themselves with the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria and to respond to requests to assist their Chair with these assessments.

Chairs are asked to be receptive and open to requests to become a member of a Specialist Group/Task Force/RLA, and members are encouraged to suggest potential new members for Chairs to consider.

In general, SSC Specialist Group members have the responsibility to contribute to their Specialist Group for the purpose of raising the profile and credibility of the Commission's work and their own species conservation priorities amongst relevant audiences. SG and TF Chairs play a vital role in achieving a smooth working relationship between IUCN and SSC members, as well as providing guidance and leadership and ensuring active involvement at all levels.

Points of Note:

- On appointment by the SSC Chair and as noted in the Terms of Reference for SG/TF Chairs, only the SG/TF Chair or their designees are authorized to speak on behalf of the SG/TF, either in person or over his/her own signature and on SG/TF letterhead;
- IUCN has specific rules about who has authority to speak on behalf of the organization, in public fora, including the SSC. The IUCN Statutes give the right of intervention on behalf of the organization to the Director General of IUCN or others delegated by her or him. For SSC, this means that at international meetings only SG/TF Chairs or their designees who are formal members of the IUCN Delegation are permitted to speak on behalf of IUCN or the SSC and then only with the agreement of the Head of the IUCN Delegation;
- It is extremely important that SSC members inform SG Chairs and the GSP when they are asked to contribute to proposals to amend the CITES Appendices for CITES CoP meetings (assisting Parties in this regard, who submit the proposals). Notifying the SG Chair and GSP should be done as early as is practically possible;
- Individual SG/TF members or groups of members may make any statement they wish on any matter in their independent and private capacity, but they shall not represent themselves as speaking on behalf of the SG/TF, the SSC or IUCN (including on SG/TF letterhead) unless the SG/TF Chair has expressly authorized it. This is to ensure consistency within the group in communicating science-based information on behalf of IUCN, the SSC and/or SG/TF.

Clearly stated expectations and a definition of responsibilities allow everyone to understand their roles and limits, as well as the roles and limitations of others. It is important for the broader SSC network to understand what to expect from the SSC Chair, the SSC Chair's Office and the staff of the GSP. In general, the SSC Chair's Office staff and GSP staff are able to respond and work directly with the SG/TF Chairs and officers, but not with individual Group members (SSC has ~8,000 individual members).

Benefits of SSC membership

Relationships within each SG/TF and between SG/TFs, the SSC and IUCN are based on mutual benefits and reciprocal advantages. Membership offers opportunities for individuals to work within the SSC network, to contribute to species conservation, and be part of a well-respected and highly effective body of experts. Often the greatest reward that SSC members feel is the ability to contribute their own expertise to the global conservation effort and the aggregation of their knowledge for higher-level impact.

In brief, SSC membership provides the following benefits:

- The ability to influence policy and decision making within the individual Specialist Groups, the SSC and IUCN and beyond, at a global policy level as well as internationally through the policy fora in which IUCN engages (e.g. the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES));
- Leveraged and amplified effectiveness on conservation issues;
- Contribution to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™;
- Contribution to Species, the annual report of SSC;
- Up-to-date information on the most important threats to biodiversity and the actions being taken to mitigate these threats;
- Communication with a global network of experts within and outside a members own field of expertise;
- Affiliation with the single largest professional body of species experts in the world, and, correspondingly;
- Professional honour and peer recognition, and personal and professional satisfaction;
- Inclusion in the SSC Directory of Members;
- One-third discount off IUCN Publications;
- Meeting attendance: Specialist Group Meetings, IUCN Regional Meetings, SSC Regional Meetings and SSC Commission-wide meetings, usually held in conjunction with the IUCN World Conservation Congress are open to SSC members¹; and
- Access to information exchange through e-mail, dedicated listservs, the Species e-bulletin, Specialist Group newsletters, and IUCN, SSC and Specialist Group websites.

The major responsibility of SSC members is to maintain contact with their Specialist Group Chair and respond promptly to requests that help the SSC to pursue its objectives in a timely manner. For example, this may include contributing to reviews of draft SSC technical guidelines and CITES listing proposals or providing other species-conservation advice and tools, such as training and workshop materials. The SSC also requests the services of Specialist Groups in providing Red List assessments of the species within their remit. This is one of the most valuable contributions that Specialist Groups make to the SSC and members are asked to familiarize themselves with the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria and to respond to requests to assist their Specialist Group Chair with these assessments.

¹ Please note that meeting attendance is usually at the member's own expense.

In general, SSC Specialist Group members have the responsibility to contribute to their Specialist Group for the purpose of raising the profile and credibility of the Commission's work and their own species conservation priorities amongst relevant audiences. It is important to note that Specialist Groups are not advocacy bodies *per se* - they are providers of sound, defensible, technical information. Therefore, while Specialist Group or Task Force members may communicate the work of a Specialist Group or Task Force, only the Chair of a Specialist Group or Task Force is authorised to speak on behalf of the Group, directly and over his/her own signature under the Group's letterhead. Likewise, a Specialist Group or Task Force Chair will only speak on behalf of the SSC or IUCN when authorised to do so.

Use of Logos

Use of the IUCN and SSC logos is at the discretion of the SSC Chair, and permission for use can only be granted by the SSC Chair. The SSC logo must always be used in tandem with the IUCN logo, thus permission for its use must always be sought. The IUCN SSC logo is commonly used, for example, on Group websites and newsletters; invariably, requests for permission to use the logo in such cases are a given, but there may be instances in which the Chair may consider that the use of the IUCN SSC logo would not be appropriate. Note that there are strict guidelines governing the use of the IUCN SSC logo, which must be followed.

Communication

Members are actively encouraged to contribute to communicating the work of the SSC both across the IUCN network and through external channels. Please liaise with your Chair to bring exciting, topical and newsworthy material to the attention of the SSC Chair's Office and the GSP.

For more information on communication, see the [Terms-of-Reference IUCN Species Survival Commission Specialist Group and Task Force Chairs 2013-2016](#) and the [SSC Communications Quick Reference Guide](#).

Fundraising

In general, IUCN SSC Specialist Group Chairs, and the Groups themselves, are not implementers of conservation projects or programmes on the ground. Implementing conservation action should largely remain the domain of individual SG members or groupings of members. The SG Chair and other SG officers play an important role in supporting their members, albeit not necessarily in the implementation of projects or programmes *per se*. In essence, the SG/TF Chairs and support staff will generally act in a support function to better enable their members to collect species information and to implement species conservation action. The role of the SG/TF Chairs and support staff could be described as facilitation and networking at a higher level to support the conservation activities of their members in the field.

SG/TFs are encouraged to seek funds to support the group's operations if necessary, but preferably to focus any fundraising efforts on support for priority conservation actions. At times, this may involve helping individual SG members or groups of members to secure funds for activities which their SG has identified as priorities.

For more information on fundraising, see the documents "[A Guide to Seeking Funding from Foundations](#)" and "[Fundraising: A Summary for SSC Specialist Groups](#)".

What next?

If you are a member of a Specialist Group, Red List Authority or Task Force, we recommend that you contact your Chair or Focal Point for guidance and advice regarding your membership and the expected deliverables of your Group. Please bear in mind that, due to the size of our membership, the SSC Chair, SSC Chair's Office, and GSP staff are not generally able to communicate directly with individual Group members. Further information on the SSC can be found on the [IUCN Species](#) webpages.

Your invitation to join the IUCN Species Survival Commission is based on your considerable expertise, which we believe will add value to the work of the Commission. We sincerely hope that you will accept your invitation to contribute to the world's greatest source of information about species, their importance, their conservation threats and their conservation needs.

Useful resources

A full list of available documents and resources which members may find useful:

[Directory of Specialist Groups](#)

[Profile of each Specialist Group and RLA \(*Advancing the Species Conservation Agenda: An overview of the IUCN SSC Network 2009-2012*\)](#)

[Species Magazine – Annual Report](#)

[Monthly Species e-bulletin](#)

[IUCN Knowledge Products](#)

[IUCN Species Programme](#)

[IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™](#)