Updated List of Threatened Species Shows Significant Changes

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has released an updated Red List of Threatened Species, one of the key tools used to determine the status of the Earth’s biodiversity. Since the release of the last edition in September 2000, a number of significant changes have occurred. Over 400 new species assessments have been included, with 124 species entering one of the threatened categories. There are now 11,167 species threatened with extinction, with several new additions and notable shifts in status.

The Red List is based on information supplied by a network of 7,000 experts on plants and animals working in almost every country of the world, and data from a number of partner organizations, including BirdLife International, Conservation International, The Ocean Conservancy, and NatureServe.

The Saiga antelope (Saiga tatarica) is now considered Critically Endangered. Inhabiting the open dry steppe grasslands and semi-arid deserts of Central Asia, this species has undergone major population declines as a result of poaching for meat and for export of horns that are used in traditional medicine. In 2000, the population had decreased from over one million to less than 200,000. Current surveys indicate that less than 50,000 animals now remain in the wild.

The Iberian lynx (Lynx pardinus) is close to becoming the first wild cat species to go extinct for at least 2,000 years. This Critically Endangered species occurs in Mediterranean woodland and maquis thicket. Habitat fragmentation by agricultural development has resulted in population decline. Human control of the abundant rabbit population in Europe resulted in the disappearance of the lynx’s principal prey. With the main food source decimated, the lynx population has crashed.

Mexican and Brazilian cactus assessments have been added to the list, bringing the total number of threatened plant species up to 5,714. The true count of threatened plant species is much higher as only approximately 4 percent of the world’s described plants have been evaluated. Trees make up the majority of the listed plant species, since these have been relatively thoroughly assessed.

Seven species have been added to the list as Extinct or Extinct in the Wild, bringing the total to 811 species. These species include the sea mink (Mustela macrodon) which was last seen in 1860, and the Réunion Island sheldgoose (Mascarenachens kervazoi) which became extinct around 1710.

Mammillaria glochidiata is one of two endemic Mexican cactus species declared Extinct in the Wild. A very small population of this cactus, estimated at 50 individuals and confined to a single location, was found in 1991. A visit in 1993 showed a reduction in population size to about 15 individuals. During two later visits, including an extensive search of the canyon in which it occurred, no plants were found.

Two species previously assessed as Extinct have been rediscovered - the Lord Howe Island stick insect (Dryocoelus australis) and the Bavarian pine vole (Microtus bavaricus). The stick insect was believed to have become extinct in 1920 after the introduction of rats to Lord Howe Island, but was rediscovered in 2001. It is estimated that the island currently supports fewer than 50 mature individuals, and thus is considered Critically Endangered. No specimens of the pine vole were recorded after 1962, but a small population of this species was found in 2000, just across the German-Austrian border. Further research is required to determine the population size of this species.

“On the Red List, all species are treated with equal importance – the humble Bavarian pine vole stands alongside the African rhino,” said IUCN Director General, Achim Steiner. “It provides the international benchmark
to help guide effective biodiversity conservation.”

Indonesia, India, Brazil and China are among the countries with the most threatened mammals and birds, while plant species are declining rapidly in South and Central America, Central and West Africa, and Southeast Asia. Habitat loss and degradation affect 89 percent of all threatened birds, 83 percent of mammals, and 91 percent of threatened plants assessed.

The 2002 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is the first of an annual update of the Red List database which is housed on its own, searchable website <http://www.redlist.org/>. The figures will change annually as new species assessments are included, currently-listed species are re-assessed, and species undergo taxonomic revisions.

**Job Opportunities**

The Center for Tropical Forest Science-Arnold Arboretum (CTFS-AA) Asia Program of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) coordinates a network of long-term research programs in the tropical forests of eight Asian countries. Postdoctoral fellows are sought in forest ecology and the evolution and biogeography of forest communities. Strong analytical background preferred; established record of research and scholarly publication in tropical forest ecology or evolution required. Field experience is not essential. The positions are based at Harvard University. Send CV and names of three references to: Stuart Davies, CTFS-AA Asia Program, The Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University, 22 Divinity Ave, Cambridge, MA 02138 USA; E-mail: <sdavies@oeb.harvard.edu>. The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University and Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute are equal opportunity/affirmative action employers.

**Current Literature**


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