Red List Reveals World’s Mammals in Crisis

From IUCN

The most comprehensive assessment of the world’s mammals has confirmed an extinction crisis, with almost one in four at risk of disappearing forever, according to The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, revealed at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain, on 6 October 2008. The new study to assess the world’s mammals shows at least 1,141 of the 5,487 mammals on Earth are known to be threatened with extinction. At least 76 mammals have become extinct since 1500. The results also show conservation can bring species back from the brink of extinction, with five percent of currently threatened mammals showing signs of recovery in the wild.

“The reality is that the number of threatened mammals could be as high as 36 percent,” says Jan Schipper, of Conservation International and lead author in an article in Science, which includes co-authors Louise Emmons, Kristofer Helgen, and Monik Oprea of the National Museum of Natural History.

The results show 188 mammals are in the highest threat category of Critically Endangered, including the Iberian Lynx (Lynx pardinus), which has a population of just 84-143 adults and has continued to decline due to a shortage of its primary prey, the European Rabbit (Oryctolagus cuniculus).

China’s Père David’s Deer (Elaphurus davidianus), is listed as Extinct in the Wild. However, the captive and semi-captive populations have increased in recent years and it is possible that truly wild populations could be re-established soon. It may be too late, however, to save the additional 29 species that have been flagged as Critically Endangered Possibly Extinct, including Cuba’s Little Earth Hutia (Mesocapromys sanfelipensis), which has not been seen in nearly 40 years.

Nearly 450 mammals have been listed as Endangered, including the Tasmanian Devil (Sarcophilus harrisii), which moved from Least Concern to Endangered after the global population declined by more than 60 percent in the last 10 years due to a fatal infectious facial cancer.

Habitat loss and degradation affect 40 percent of the world’s mammals. It is most extreme in Central and South America, West, East and Central Africa, Madagascar, and in South and Southeast Asia. Over harvesting is wiping out larger mammals, especially in Southeast Asia, but also in parts of Africa and South America.

But it is not all bad news. The assessment of the world’s mammals shows that species can recover with concerted conservation efforts. The Black-footed Ferret (Mustela nigripes) moved from Extinct in the Wild to Endangered after a successful reintroduction by the US Fish and Wildlife Service into eight western states and Mexico from 1991-2008.

The project to assess the world’s mammals was conducted with help from more than 1,800 scientists from over 130 countries.

Current Literature


