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<http://www.iucn.org>
press@iucn.org

NEWS RELEASE

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Release of the 2003 *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* - the world's most authoritative source of information on extinction risk

Number of known threatened species tops 12,000. Alien invasive species wreak havoc on native island plants while the variegated spider monkey, Mekong giant catfish, riverine rabbit and Galapagos snails all move closer to extinction.

Gland, Switzerland, 18 November 2003 (IUCN). The Seychelles, the Galapagos, Hawaii, and the remote South Atlantic islands all conjure up images of tropical paradise or rugged beauty. But beneath these islands' striking appeal lies a story of invasion and destruction that is undermining the future of thousands of native species.

This is one of the stark messages to emerge from the 2003 update of the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*, the world's most authoritative inventory of the conservation status of plants and animals. Thousands of scientists and conservationists from all over the world contribute to this rapidly expanding list, compiled by IUCN – The World Conservation Union, through its Species Survival Commission (SSC) and partner organizations.

Since the release of the 2002 Red List, more than 2,000 new entries have been added and 380 taxa (species, subspecies, etc.) reassessed. The IUCN Red List now includes 12,259 species threatened with extinction (falling into the Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable categories). A total of 762 plant and animal species are now recorded as Extinct with a further 58 known only in cultivation or captivity.

Some notable new additions to the List this year include 1,164 Ecuadorian plants, 125 Hawaiian plants, 303 cycads and 35 Galapagos Island snails. All known conifer species have now been assessed, including a new discovery in Viet Nam and a rediscovered species in China. The many movements into higher threat categories include one of the world's largest freshwater fish, three Neotropical primates and six albatrosses.

"More than 12,000 species are known to be threatened with extinction. While we are still only scratching the surface in assessing all known species, we are confident this figure is an indicator of what is happening to global biological diversity," said Achim Steiner, IUCN Director General.

"The *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* provides the best available knowledge necessary for sound conservation action. We now need the political will and resources to stem the loss of biodiversity. Human activities may be the main threat to the world's species but humans can also help them recover – the Chinese crested ibis, the Arabian oryx and the white rhino are just a few examples," Steiner added.

Islands in peril

Island populations of native plants and animals are being lost through the effects of invasive alien species which are a major threat to global biodiversity. Hundreds of new plant assessments from Hawaii, the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), British Virgin Islands, the Seychelles, Tristan da Cunha, St. Helena and Ascension reveal a bleak outlook.

Tristan da Cunha, St. Helena, Ascension and the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) in the South Atlantic have developed their own unique suites of animals and plants that are extremely vulnerable to human disturbance. As on many other islands around the world, habitat destruction, introduced grazing animals and predation by and competition with invasive species are unrelenting. Invasive species have caused the extinction of four of Ascension's plants that are found nowhere else on Earth.

Hawaii's plants are also under serious threat from invasive species. Grazing animals first introduced to the islands in the late 18th century have caused massive damage. As the native plants decline, the remaining individuals are out-competed by introduced weeds and attacked by insects, many of them also introduced. Loss of pollinator species that co-evolved with particular plants means there is little or no chance for them to reproduce. Add to this, housing development, tourism infrastructure, and agriculture, and the future for the Hawaiian flora looks grim.

Of the 125 endemic (found nowhere else) Hawaiian plant species added to the Red List this year, 85 are threatened and the number is set to increase. One example is the Critically Endangered Maui hesperommania (*Hesperomannia arbuscula*), a shrubby tree pushed to the edge of survival by a range of threats. These include habitat degradation by pigs, competition with alien plant species (such as prickly Florida blackberry *Rubus argutus* and Koster's curse *Clidemia hirta*), predation by rats, and from trampling or collecting by humans. Less than 25 individuals remain.

It is not only Hawaii's plants that are threatened by alien invasives. The Vulnerable Newcomb's snail (*Erinna newcombi*) demonstrates the effects of invasive invertebrates on Hawaii's endemic fauna. Newcomb's snail occurs only in remote waterfalls, seeps and springs of six stream systems on the island of Kauai where a variety of intentional and accidental introductions of non-native fish, snails, flies and frogs threaten its survival. The most serious threat is predation from the rosy wolf snail (*Euglandina rosea*), introduced to Hawaii in 1955, which has also wiped out many Polynesian and Mascarene island endemic species.

Galapagos Island snails are also in a precarious situation – 49 species were assessed or reassessed for this year's List and many of them are Critically Endangered, possibly already extinct. Invasive species such as goats, pigs, and fire ants are mostly to blame.

"Places such as the Galapagos, Hawaii and the Seychelles are famed for their beauty which owes itself to the diversity of plants, animals, and ecosystems. The Red List tells us that human activities are leading to a swathe of extinctions that could make these islands ecologically and aesthetically barren," said Steiner.

Continental species cling harder to the edge

Meanwhile, continental species are not faring well either. Of the Neotropical primates, three species have moved up into higher threat categories. The

Mexican black howler monkey (*Alouatta pigra*) moved from Least Concern to Endangered. There has been a 56% loss of habitat already and with continuing loss, the population is expected to decline by over 70% in the next 30 years.

The variegated spider monkey (*Ateles hybridus*), found only in Colombia and Venezuela, moves from Endangered to Critically Endangered, and is at extreme risk. Threatened by habitat loss due to urban growth, agriculture and cattle grazing, the pied tamarin (*Saguinus bicolor*) also moves from Endangered to Critically Endangered.

Only one primate species has shifted into a lower threat category – the golden-lion tamarin (*Leontopithecus rosalia*), from Critically Endangered to Endangered. After nearly 30 years of conservation efforts, including the establishment of a new subpopulation through translocation to a new protected area, the population size has increased.

Asia's Mekong giant catfish (*Pangasianodon gigas*), one of the world's largest freshwater fish (growing up to 3m in length and weighing up to 300kg), is found only in the Mekong River basin area (Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand and Lao PDR) and has been upgraded from Endangered to Critically Endangered. This is largely due to over-fishing, habitat loss (such as through siltation and dredging) and obstruction of migratory routes through dam construction. Its population has declined by more than 80% over the last 13 years.

South Africa's riverine rabbit (*Bunolagus monticularis*) is uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered. Found in the central Karoo region, this species is now estimated to number fewer than 250 breeding pairs. With ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation, trapping, and predation by feral cats and dogs, the population is expected to decline further.

Greening the Red List

The Red List is making great progress in increasing its number of plant assessments. All known cycad species have now been assessed, and there is also complete coverage of the conifers.

This year 1,164 plant species from Ecuador have been included in the Red List and 813 of these are threatened. Notable examples include the Endangered shrub *Centropogon erythraeus*, known from only two subpopulations in the southern Andes. Ecuador is extremely important for plant conservation, with four highly diverse regions - the Galapagos archipelago, the coastal lowlands, the Andes, and the Amazon – all squeezed into an area the size of Italy.

Cycads, the oldest seed plants on earth, are now also amongst the most threatened plants. Two species have already gone Extinct in the Wild, and more are likely to join them. This year, 303 cycads were evaluated and 155 of them (more than 50%) are threatened. This makes cycads one of the most threatened groups of species currently on the Red List.

Botanists were excited by the discovery of a new conifer, *Xanthocyparis vietnamensis*, in Viet Nam in 2001, but the species has been assessed as Endangered based on its restricted range and ongoing deforestation in the area. Also, *Thuja sutchuenensis*, thought to be Extinct in the Wild, was rediscovered in China in 1999, 100 years after it was last seen. The wood from this tree is particularly resistant to decay and is used to build houses. Only a single remote and largely inaccessible subpopulation remains and the species is Critically Endangered.

New kingdoms enter the Red List

This year the Red List has entered the realms of seaweeds and lichens for the first time. Bennett's seaweed (*Vanvoorstia bennettiana*) has been declared Extinct. It was only ever collected from two sites (New South Wales, Australia) and has not been seen for over 100 years. All sites where this species was known to occur have been destroyed by human activities.

The perforate reindeer lichen (*Cladonia perforata*) from Florida is listed as Endangered because of its restricted range, habitat loss, hurricanes and fire. The boreal felt lichen (*Erioderma pedicellatum*) is Critically Endangered. Previously found in Canada, Norway and Sweden, it has suffered a major population decline over the last 100 years and is thought to be extinct in the latter two countries.

Menace to the marine realm

On the marine front, six species of albatross now face a greater threat of extinction than previously thought, largely as a result of longline fishing. All of the planet's 21 species of albatross are now considered to be globally under threat compared to 16 reported in the 2000 Red List.

The black-browed albatross (*Thalassarche melanophrys*) has moved from Vulnerable to Endangered. It is one of the most frequently killed species in many longline fisheries and also dies in trawl fisheries.

This year 175 sharks and rays were assessed or reassessed for the Red List. There are now 57 species and a further 19 stocks assessed as threatened. The biology of deepwater shark species makes them particularly vulnerable to habitat changes and fishing pressures. As commercial development of new deep sea fisheries is increasing, some species could be driven to extinction before management can be implemented, and possibly even before they are discovered or described.

The Northeast Atlantic subpopulation of the spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*) is now Endangered while the Northwest Atlantic subpopulation is Vulnerable. High demand in European markets has stimulated fisheries in the Northwest Atlantic and intensive fisheries in the Northeast Atlantic have been yielding declining catches since the early 1960s.

Joining the List as Endangered is the Mediterranean subpopulation of the short-beaked common dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*). Its population has declined more than 50% in the Mediterranean region over the last 30-40 years due to reduced dolphin prey in the Mediterranean because of over-fishing and habitat degradation. High levels of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) found in these dolphins compared to dolphins in other areas are also cause for concern.

Although there is insufficient data to assess the species' status at the global level, the Rio Grande do Sul/Uruguay subpopulation of the river dolphin, Franciscana (*Pontoporia blainvillei*), enters the list as Vulnerable. Its population decline of more than 30% since the 1960s is mainly due to bycatch in gillnet fisheries, loss of prey species, and chemical pollution.

Another new assessment this year is the Californian black abalone (*Haliotis cracherodii*), a marine snail confined to the coastlines of California, and Baja California (Mexico) and now Critically Endangered. Its decline is partly due to commercial fisheries, but the main threat is a disease called withering syndrome, which has caused massive population declines.

"Marine species are widely believed to be resilient to extinction but they are rapidly proving that they are just as vulnerable as their land-based counterparts. The need for improved policy and practice in managing our marine environment is critical," said David Brackett, Chair of IUCN's Species Survival Commission.

A wake-up call

Indonesia, India, Brazil, China and Peru are among the countries with the highest number of known threatened birds and mammals while plants are declining rapidly in Ecuador, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brazil and Sri Lanka.

"The Red List is important in monitoring progress in reaching the target set by nations at last year's World Summit on Sustainable Development – the achievement by 2010 of a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity," said IUCN/SSC Red List Programme Officer, Craig Hilton-Taylor. "Above all, the Red List is a wake-up call to all of us. By working together we can help conserve what remains of the Earth's biodiversity."

Too big to publish in hard copy, the Red List is maintained as a searchable database on its own website: www.iucnredlist.org and is updated every year. A major analysis of the Red List will be conducted next year which will highlight where the most threatened species occur and what the major threats are. These findings will be presented to the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress in Bangkok in November 2004.

Notes

- This year's Red List update comes soon after the Vth IUCN World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa, which heard that although good progress is being made in increasing the world's protected area estate, more than 700 animal species threatened with extinction are not protected in any part of their ranges.
- Major analyses of the Red List were produced in 1996 and 2000. The 1996 List revealed that one in four mammal species and one in eight bird species face extinction, while the 2000 List confirmed that the global extinction crisis is as bad or worse than believed. Dramatic declines in populations of many species, including reptiles and primates, were reported.
- Numbers of threatened species on the Red List change from year to year, not only because new species are added to the List. Research scientists working around the world bring a constant flow of new information and this improved knowledge can result in species being upgraded to a higher threat category or, in cases where the situation is more optimistic than previously realized, downgraded to a lower threat category. Other changes may be the result of taxonomic revisions such as a species being re-classified as a subspecies and vice-versa. However, some species have moved into a different category as a result of a genuine change in conservation status (see examples).
- The IUCN Red List includes extinctions that have occurred since 1500 AD. The 2003 List includes 762 extinct species. As with the threatened categories, species can sometimes move out of the Extinct category as a result of taxonomic changes or uncertainties such as in the case of the marbled toadlet (*Uperoleia marmorata*).

- Species that have been evaluated to have a low risk of extinction are classified as Least Concern. This year, for the first time, these Least Concern assessments appear on the Red List for the sake of transparency and in order to place threatened assessments in context. A process to capture all of the Least Concern listings has begun (at the species level only), but this is likely to take many years to complete.
- The Red List is based on information supplied by IUCN's Species Survival Commission (SSC), a network of 7,000 experts on plants, animals and conservation issues, and data from a number of partner organizations. All bird data are supplied by BirdLife International. Collectively, this network holds what is the most complete scientific knowledge base on the biology and current conservation status of species.
- As the Red List expands to include complete assessments for the various taxonomic groups, a more detailed analysis of the statistics every four to five years will allow better comparison between years and a better understanding of the general trends in biodiversity over time. Work is underway to re-assess all mammals (approximately 6,000 species) and all birds (approximately 10,000 species); and assess amphibians (approximately 5,000 species); reptiles (approximately 8,000 species); freshwater fish (approximately 10,000 species); sharks, rays and chimaeras (approximately 1,000 species); and freshwater molluscs (approximately 5,000 species). Plant, invertebrate and marine species assessments are also in progress. By 2008 it is hoped that a worldwide biodiversity assessment will be possible using a representative sample of taxa.
- To help meet these ambitious targets, a Red List consortium has been formed involving IUCN and its Species Survival Commission, BirdLife International, Conservation International's Center for Applied Biodiversity Science, and NatureServe.

For more information contact:

Craig Hilton-Taylor, IUCN/SSC Red List Programme Officer
 Tel: +44 (0)1223 277966; Fax +44 (0)1223 277845
 Email: craig.hilton-taylor@ssc-uk.org

Caroline Pollock, IUCN/SSC Red List Programme Assistant
 Tel: +44 (0)1223 277966; Email: caroline.pollock@ssc-uk.org

Anna Knee, IUCN Species Programme Communications Officer
 Tel: +41 (0)22 999 0153; Email: alk@iucn.org

Xenya Cherny, IUCN Communications
 Tel: +41 (0)22 999 0127; Email: xec@iucn.org

Olivia Pasini, IUCN Communications
 Tel: +41 (0)22 999 0205; Email: olp@iucn.org

The 2003 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is available as a searchable database on its own website: www.iucnredlist.org.

The 2003 Red List Media Kit is available online at:
<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/RedList2003/English/newsreleaseEn.htm>