



# Species

Newsletter of the Species Survival Commission

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Special Quadrennium Edition



International Union for Conservation of Nature



# Species 49

Special Quadrennium Edition

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A joint message from the SSC Chair and Head of the Species Programme focusing on the achievements of the Quadrennium

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**Species** is the newsletter of the Species Survival Commission of IUCN—International Union for Conservation of Nature. Commission members, in addition to providing leadership for conservation efforts for specific plant and animal groups, contribute to technical and scientific counsel to biodiversity conservation projects throughout the world. They provide advice to governments, international conventions, and conservation organizations.

**Team Species** - Helen Boulden, Lynette Lew, Julie Griffin, Dena Cator and Carol Poole

**Layout** - NatureBureau

**Cover Photo** - The Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) by Kewalo Basin Marine Mammal Laboratory and The Dolphin Institute

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(ACAP: [www.amphibians.org](http://www.amphibians.org)) as a blueprint for action, the ASG is actively working with local and international partners to stem the wave of extinctions that are affecting amphibians around the world. One key component of this strategy is

identifying and safeguarding those habitats that harbour especially high concentrations of threatened species.

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species*

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Sri Lanka boasts an extraordinary diversity of endemic amphibian species; it also holds the dubious honour of the most documented amphibian extinctions of any

country in the world. The 8% of original cloud forest that remains continues to dwindle, putting many remaining species at risk. Morningside, a 1,000-ha cloud forest in south-eastern Sri Lanka, was identified by the Alliance for Zero Extinction ([www.zeroextinction.org](http://www.zeroextinction.org)) as one of the top five highest conservation priorities in the world. The ASG and Conservation International worked with the Wildlife Heritage Trust and the Forest Department of Sri Lanka to have Morningside designated a Forest Reserve for Biodiversity Conservation.

Early last year we teamed up with local and International partners to achieve a similar conservation success in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia. Upon learning that a critical refuge for six endemic amphibian species was slated for conversion into vacation homes, we joined forces with the American Bird Conservancy to help Colombian NGO Fundación ProAves purchase the 650-hectare area of forest. The newly established El Dorado reserve is now being managed by Fundación ProAves, who monitor the amphibians and promote ecotourism at El Dorado, encouraging safe and sustainable enjoyment of the site's

biodiversity while ensuring the survival of the threatened species it was created to protect.

**SG website:** <http://www.amphibians.org/>

### Positive news for Africa's rhinos

The African Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) hit an all time low in the mid 1990's and the Southern White Rhino (*Ceratotherium simum simum*) in the mid 1890's, and both have experienced good recoveries commensurate with the time frames involved. Since its reconstitution in 1991, the African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) has concentrated on leveraging conservation action in the Range States, and believes that it has made significant contributions to the observed 69% increase in numbers of Black Rhino, currently estimated at 4,180, and the 302% increase in Southern White Rhino (now at 17,480) over the past 17 years.

To achieve its mandated goal of ensuring the survival of African rhinos, the AfRSG has had to develop international best practices and mechanisms for the transfer of knowledge to the Rhino Range States without in any way damaging their 'sense of ownership' that is so crucial for motivation and successful implementation. This has largely been achieved through their inclusion in the AfRSG membership.

Apart from developing international best practices for African rhino which include, *inter alia*, area suitability, rhino introductions, monitoring and biological management to achieve optimal population growth, timeous harvesting and translocation, the AfRSG adopted a new strategy for prioritizing populations and rating projects requesting support from funding agencies. Emphasis was placed on the most viable populations of each taxon and ensuring their best security and management, as it was argued that with these in place the species survival would be assured. Strong



African black rhino, *Diceros bicornis*



support was also given to the creation of new populations with founders and in areas with ecological carrying capacities sufficient to ensure long-term viability. This approach was quite different from the traditional approach of focusing on the smallest and often most poorly-managed and performing populations, irrespective of the taxon's overall conservation status. Over the years the latter had proved unsuccessful, and had consumed a disproportionate amount of the funds available for rhino conservation on the continent.

### Conserving 'crop wild relatives' for human well-being

For many conservationists, the importance of crop wild relative (CWR) species may not be evident, yet they are part of wild biodiversity and their survival is highly compromised. There is often little known about them, they are associated with disturbed environments and are neither given priority by nature conservation agencies nor agricultural ministries. There is generally also a poor understanding of what constitutes a CWR. They are wild plant taxa that have a relatively close genetic relationship to crops (including all plants of socio-economic value to people) and through their actual or potential contribution of genetic traits to crops, they provide global food security. As progenitors of our present day crops and gene donors, they enable crops to adapt to diverse environments and confer resistance to pests and diseases, which in times of ecosystem instability and climate change is becoming increasingly critical. They thus represent a special group of plants that must at all costs be preserved for human well-being.

The Crop Wild Relatives Specialist Group (CWRSG) helps to ensure that CWRs are adequately conserved and sustainably utilized. During the 2005–2008 quadrennium members worked to develop a global strategy on CWR, originally under the aegis of PGRForum, an EU funded project, and produced an operational strategy. As further outcomes of the PGRForum, two major books on the conservation and use of CWR have been published (Maxted *et al.*, 2008; Iriondo *et al.* 2008) along with an inventory of European and Mediterranean CWRs with an information management system (<http://www.pgrforum.org/cwris/cwris.asp>). The group has subsequently established a website ([www.cwrsg.org](http://www.cwrsg.org)) and published a newsletter "Crop Wild Relative". A CWR portal was launched at CBD

COP9 in Bonn Germany this year, as part of a UNEP/GEF project "In situ conservation of Crop Wild Relatives Through Enhanced Information Management and Field Application" being implemented in five countries – Armenia, Bolivia, Madagascar, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan and led by Bioversity International. The portal serves as a gateway through which information can be made widely available.

**SG website:** [www.cwrsg.org](http://www.cwrsg.org)

### Large-scale planning for Africa's elephants

The SSC African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) has been integrally involved in supporting African elephant Range States to develop and implement sub-regional and national elephant strategies and action plans across the continent. In three of the four sub-regions – Central, Southern and West Africa (and Eastern Africa has been initiated), we

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