



The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC)

QUARTERLY REPORT / SEPTEMBER 2017





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

George Rabb was a phenomenal man. He was deeply influential to the IUCN Species Survival Commission, but that was only one of his numerous, and quiet achievements. In this issue we publish an abridged version of Simon Stuart's reflections on George's life, and his multiple contributions to conservation. It is a moving and personal piece, enriched by dozens of additional comments by many who knew him and were inspired by George. Please find the unabridged version of the article [here](#).

The initial section of this report focuses on the first SSC Steering Committee meeting of the 2017-2020 quadrennium. We met in Cartagena, Colombia, immediately after the Society for Conservation Biology's 28th International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2017). This allowed us to interact with the global community of conservation professionals, and identify opportunities for future collaboration and partnerships. Prior to the Steering Committee, the entire Chair's Office team met in person for the first time. We had the opportunity to get to know each other and learn about our expectations. We also analyzed the 2017-2020 Species Strategic Plan and considered how the team needed to be strengthened to be able to fulfill its ambitious targets. The Steering Committee meeting included a joint session with the Steering Committee

of IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management; an exceptional opportunity to explore collaboration potential between the two Commissions. The meeting closed with a public seminar at the Fundación Universitaria Los Libertadores, with attendance by students from local universities, government officials and members of non-governmental organizations.

Continuing with our internal look at the work of the Commission, David Obura, Chair of the Coral Specialist Group, shares his perspective on the challenges that he and his members face in moving the conservation agenda forward. He highlights their focus on IUCN's One Programme approach, where the scientific advances of the Specialist Group, working together with the Secretariat, respond to the expectations of Member organizations and aim to influence policy and conservation action.

The report concludes with an article by Resit Akçakaya, Chair of the Red List Standards and Petitions Subcommittee (SPSC). One of the primary roles of this group is to examine the scientific foundations of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. They periodically publish Guidelines for Using the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, which help assessors interpret the data that are used for evaluating the extinction risk of species. Since the adoption of the current version of the criteria in 2001, they have been analyzed and scrutinized by the scientific community, but some of these critiques could have been solved if the authors had shared their concerns with the SPSC previously, as some were indeed misunderstandings or related to issues that had been analyzed before. Resit's article invites the SSC community to collaborate with the SPSC on research initiatives that help improve the scientific underpinnings of the Red List.

I would like to conclude by expressing my deepest gratitude to the 32 organizations shown in the back cover of the report for their generous support to the SSC Chair's Office. Your commitment to the Commission

is fundamental to enabling the network to achieve the species conservation targets that we have set for the quadrennium.

RÉSUMÉ EXÉCUTIF

George Rabb était un homme phénoménal. Il a eu une grande influence sur la Commission de la Sauvegarde des Espèces (CSE) de l'UICN, mais ceci n'était qu'une de ses multiples et grandioses réalisations. Dans ce rapport, nous publions une version simplifiée des réflexions de Simon Stuart sur la vie de George Rabb et ses nombreuses contributions à la conservation. Ce présent article est émouvant et personnel. Il contient une variété de commentaires en majorité provenant de ceux qui l'ont connu et qui ont été inspirés par lui. La version complète de l'article est disponible [ici](#).

La première section de ce rapport est basée sur la première réunion du Conseil d'Administration du CSE de la période quadriennale 2017-2020. Cette réunion s'est tenue à Cartagena en Colombie, immédiatement après le 28ème Congrès International de Biologie de la Conservation (ICCB 2017) de la Société Biologie de la Conservation. Ceci a favorisé des échanges avec la communauté mondiale des professionnels de la conservation et d'identifier des opportunités de futures collaborations et partenariats. Pendant le Conseil d'Administration, tous les membres de l'équipe du Bureau de la Présidence du CSE se sont rencontrés physiquement pour la première fois. Nous avons eu l'occasion de nous rencontrer et de débattre sur nos attentes. Nous avons analysé le Plan Stratégique pour les Espèces 2017-2020 et renforcé l'équipe pour l'atteinte de nos objectifs ultimes. La réunion du Conseil d'Administration a abrité une session conjointe avec le Conseil d'Administration de la Commission sur la Gestion de l'Écosystème de l'UICN; ceci fut une occasion exceptionnelle d'explorer le potentiel de collaboration entre les deux commissions. La session a été clôturée par un séminaire public à la Fondation de

l'Université Los Libertadores, avec la participation des étudiants d'universités locales, de représentants du gouvernement et des membres des organisations non gouvernementales.

En parallèle avec notre vision interne du travail de la Commission, David Obura, Président du Groupe de Spécialistes en Corail a partagé ses perspectives sur les défis dont ses membres et lui font face pour le progrès de leurs objectifs de conservation. Il a donné son avis à propos du Programme de l'UICN, selon lequel, les avancées scientifiques du Groupe de Spécialistes, en collaboration avec le secrétariat, répondent aux attentes des organisations Membres et cherchent à influencer la politique et l'action de conservation.

Le rapport s'est terminé avec un article de Resit Akçakaya, Président du Sous-comité sur les Normes et Pétitions (SCNP). L'un des rôles principaux de ce groupe est d'examiner les fondements scientifiques de la Liste Rouge des Espèces Menacées de l'UICN. Il publie régulièrement des Directives d'utilisation des Catégories et Critères pour la Liste Rouge de l'UICN, qui aident les évaluateurs à interpréter les données nécessaires pour faire l'évaluation des risques d'extinction des espèces. Depuis l'adoption de la version actuelle des critères en 2001, ceux-ci ont été analysés et examinés par la communauté scientifique, mais certaines de ces critiques auraient pu être résolues si les auteurs avaient fait part de leurs préoccupations à la SCNP ; celles-ci sont des malentendus liés à des problèmes déjà analysés au paravent. L'article du Resit invite la communauté de CSE à collaborer avec SCNP dans les initiatives de recherche qui aideront à améliorer la base scientifique pour la Liste Rouge.

Je voudrais conclure en exprimant ma plus profonde gratitude aux 32 organisations qui figurent sur la découverte de clôture du rapport, pour leur soutien cordial au Bureau du Président du CSE. Votre engagement avec la Commission est fondamental

pour permettre au réseau d'atteindre les objectifs de conservation des espèces que nous avons proposés au cours de cette période quadriennale.

RESUMEN EJECUTIVO

George Rabb fue un hombre fenomenal. Él tuvo una gran influencia en la Comisión para la Supervivencia de las Especies de UICN, pero ese fue solo uno de sus múltiples y silentes logros. En este reporte publicamos una versión abreviada de las reflexiones de Simon Stuart sobre la vida de George Rabb y sus múltiples contribuciones a la conservación. Es un artículo conmovedor y personal, enriquecido por docenas de comentarios adicionales de muchos quienes lo conocieron y fueron inspirados por George. La versión completa del artículo está disponible [aquí](#).

La primera sección de este reporte se enfoca en la primera reunión de Junta Directiva de CSE del cuatrienio 2017-2020. Sostuvimos la reunión en Cartagena, Colombia, inmediatamente después del 28avo Congreso Internacional de Biología de la Conservación (ICCB 2017) de la Sociedad de Biología de la Conservación. Esto nos permitió interactuar con la comunidad global de profesionales de la conservación e identificar oportunidades para futuras colaboraciones y alianzas. Antes de la Junta Directiva, todo el equipo de la Oficina de la Presidencia de CSE se reunió en persona por primera vez. Tuvimos la oportunidad de conocernos y aprender sobre nuestras expectativas. También analizamos el Plan Estratégico de Especies 2017-2020 y analizamos cómo debemos fortalecer el equipo para alcanzar sus ambiciosas metas. La reunión de Junta Directiva incluyó una sesión conjunta con la Junta Directiva de la Comisión sobre Manejo de Ecosistémico de UICN; una oportunidad excepcional para explorar el potencial de colaboración entre ambas Comisiones. La reunión cerró con un seminario público en Fundación Universitaria Los Libertadores, con la participación de estudiantes de las universidades

locales, oficiales gubernamentales y miembros de organizaciones no-gubernamentales.

Continuando con nuestra visión interna del trabajo de la Comisión, David Obura, Presidente del Grupo de Especialistas en Corales, comparte sus perspectivas en los retos que él y sus miembros enfrentan al avanzar en sus metas de conservación. Él resalta su enfoque en la aproximación de Un Programa de UICN, donde los avances científicos del Grupo de Especialistas, trabajando junto al secretariado, responden a las expectativas de las organizaciones Miembro y buscan influenciar la política y acción en conservación.

El reporte concluye con un artículo de Resit Akçakaya, Presidente del Subcomité de Estándares y Peticiones (SCEP). Uno de los principales roles de este grupo es examinar los fundamentos científicos de la Lista Roja de Especies Amenazadas de UICN. Ellos publican periódicamente Directrices de uso de las Categorías y Criterios de la Lista Roja de la UICN, que ayudan a evaluadores a interpretar los datos necesarios para la evaluación del riesgo de extinción de especies. Desde la adopción de la versión actual de los criterios en 2001, éstos han sido analizados y escudriñados por la comunidad científica, pero algunas de estas críticas pudieron haber sido resueltas si los autores hubiesen compartido sus preocupaciones previamente con SCEP, ya que algunas realmente se trataban de malentendidos o estaban relacionadas con problemas que ya habían sido analizados antes. El artículo de Resit invita a la comunidad de CSE a colaborar con SCEP en iniciativas de investigación que ayuden a mejorar las bases científicas de la Lista Roja.

Quisiera concluir expresando mi más profunda gratitud a las 32 organizaciones que se muestran en la cubierta de cierre del reporte por su generoso apoyo a la Oficina de la Presidencia de CSE. Su compromiso con la Comisión es fundamental para permitir que la red alcance las metas de conservación de especies que nos hemos propuesto en este cuatrienio.



Rüppell's Bustard, *Heterotetrax rueppellii*, LC
Photo © Yathin S Krishnappa



Joint SSC-CEM Steering Committee meeting Cartagena, August 2017

STEERING COMMITTEE

The first SSC Steering Committee meeting of the 2017-2020 quadrennium was held in Cartagena, Colombia, on 31 July – 4 August. This was the first meeting for 6 new members of the Steering Committee and also an exceptional opportunity to promote collaboration with IUCN's Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM).

One major decision achieved during the Steering Committee meeting was the modification of SSC bylaws to include a new category of members: Action Partnerships. An Action Partnership is a group of organizations convened by the SSC to address key priorities identified by the Commission. The mandate, objectives, governance and main programme areas of work of each Action Partnership shall be defined in its constitution. One first member of this category is the Asian Species Action Partnership (ASAP).

As part of the SSC Chair's Office key priority of increasing diversity across SSC, a proposal was raised and approved by the Steering Committee to establish the Terms of Reference and appoint 8 Regional

"I found that one of the most interesting discussions was related to the position of the SSC on the benefit of including, as part of the IUCN community of civil society organizations, those that may be known to play an active role in animal welfare. Positions of the SC members were all very thoughtful. What is a good conservation cause is something that we know and understand, but what is a good conservation philosophy is a more debatable issue."

Claudio Campagna.

Vice-Chairs for the 2017-2020 quadrennium. These Vice-Chairs will work in their regions to: i) Design and implement processes for expanding the SSC membership. ii) Actively seek individuals that are emerging as possible future leaders in SSC. iii) Establish contact with IUCN members, identify opportunities for joint activities, and promote their active participation in the 2017-2020 Species Strategic Plan. iv) Engage with governments to encourage the adoption of knowledge products mobilized by IUCN.

These Steering Committee members were appointed as Regional Vice-Chairs:

- Africa: Pricelia Tumenta
- East Europe, North and Central Asia: Pending
- Meso and South America: Gabriela Lichtenstein
- North America and the Caribbean: Greg Mueller
- Oceania: Pending
- South and East Asia: Mirza Kusri
- West Asia: Ehab Eid
- West Europe: Luigi Boitani

"Every single topic presented during my first SSC steering committee meeting was very significant for me, since it paved the way ahead to understand how the SSC is working, and how I can evolve my future directions and contributions as a representative from West Asia."

Ehab Eid.

Another important decision made during the Steering Committee was the endorsement of the Guidelines for Species Conservation Planning. These guidelines were developed by the former Species Conservation Planning Sub-Committee (SCPSC) during 2015-2017; under the leadership of Mark Stanley Price. The guidelines build

on and revise the 2008 *Strategic Planning for Species Conservation: A Handbook*. After this endorsement, the guidelines will now enter writing style revisions, design, and production, before publication, expected by late 2017 or early 2018. These guidelines are seen as a living document, and will be revised and updated periodically.

Other topics addressed during the meeting were brief reports and discussions from the six SSC Sub-Committees (Freshwater Conservation, Invertebrate Conservation, Marine Conservation, Plant Conservation, Standards and Petitions, and Red List Committee). It was also the opportunity to Review of the Species Strategic Plan 2017-2020 and proposals of Theory of Change and Evaluation Frameworks for SSC and the Red List. The Steering Committee also heard and discussed about progress on Key Biodiversity Areas, the future of Species Conservation Planning in the SSC, the Barometer of Life goals and how to achieve them, status and future steps on the Green Lists, potential for increasing TRAFFIC-SSC integration, EICAT consultation and progress on the Honolulu Challenge, sustainable use in the SSC and IUCN, West and Central African Species Action Partnership (WCASAP), and Protected Area Friendliness.

The Steering Committee meeting was organized to coincide with the Commission on Ecosystem Management's (CEM) Steering Committee meeting and a joint session was held to explore the value and potential for collaboration between the two commissions. This session was also joined by Kristen Walker Painemilla, Chair of the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP), and Julia Miranda, Deputy Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA).

The session highlighted, among other topics, how collaboration between SSC and CEM, and other Commissions, would be of value to enhance their impact on biodiversity conservation, add efficiency in development of projects, facilitate resource sharing,

help avoid conflict and duplication of efforts and generate benefits from the experiences and expertise of the others.

Several mechanisms for collaboration between SSC and CEM were identified, such as inviting representatives from each Commission to attend counterpart Steering Committee meetings, mapping areas of common interest as well as gaps and differences, creating links between overlapping groups, including members of related groups into the counterpart commission groups, and creating joint Task Forces to address specific topics.

Multiple potential areas and actions for collaboration were recognized:

- Species and ecosystems red listing: Ensure both assessment tools can inform and guide designation of Key Biodiversity Areas and Green Lists. Incorporate information from both red lists into the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT). Adopt a common language to communicate the multifaceted outcomes. Appoint representatives from each Commission to serve on the counterpart Standards and Petitions Committees.
- Ecosystem restoration and conservation planning: Integrate ecosystem and species perspectives in assessing the status of landscapes and preparation of conservation plans. Use of Regional Livability Planning (RLP) for prioritization. Reestablish species populations in landscape restorations to ensure ecological processes are maintained. Understand the role of keystone species in ecosystem management, restoration, the delivery of ecosystem services, and as indicators of ecosystem health.
- Transboundary conservation: Develop transboundary landscape level projects, as well as guidelines for ensuring that species and ecosystem perspectives are considered in conservation planning in transboundary situations.
- Fisheries: Incorporate CBD Ecosystem Approach, as fisheries management and conservation have tended to be species-based. Explore the topic of trawling, consider preparing a motion for the next IUCN Members Assembly, and explore a mechanism across all six commissions.
- Global policy: Support IUCN Secretariat for the coordination across commissions to address SDGs and to improve understanding of why Aichi targets are not being met. Explore the production of concept notes on the roles of biodiversity on SDGs. Develop guidance to help countries develop their Nationally Determined Contributions under the UNFCCC.
- Explore development of nature-based poverty mitigation strategies, given the strong correlation between the state of a nation's biodiversity, and the array of ecosystem services necessary to promote development.
- Collaborate also with CEESP to enhance understanding of the role of cultural aspects on conservation efforts and effectiveness.
- Develop a common global classification scheme for ecosystems; ensuring that the scheme is relevant at national levels and can be used for mapping across scales.
- Examination of "loss-drivers" that affect species and ecosystems.
- Biofuels: Identify and follow issues related to biofuels and consider assessing the impact of biofuel incentives and production on biodiversity.



Joint SSC-CEM Steering Committee meeting Cartagena, August 2017



Joint SSC-CEM Steering Committee meeting Cartagena, August 2017

RECENT ACTIVITIES



Conferences

Where the SSC Chair's office attended or offered a lecture.



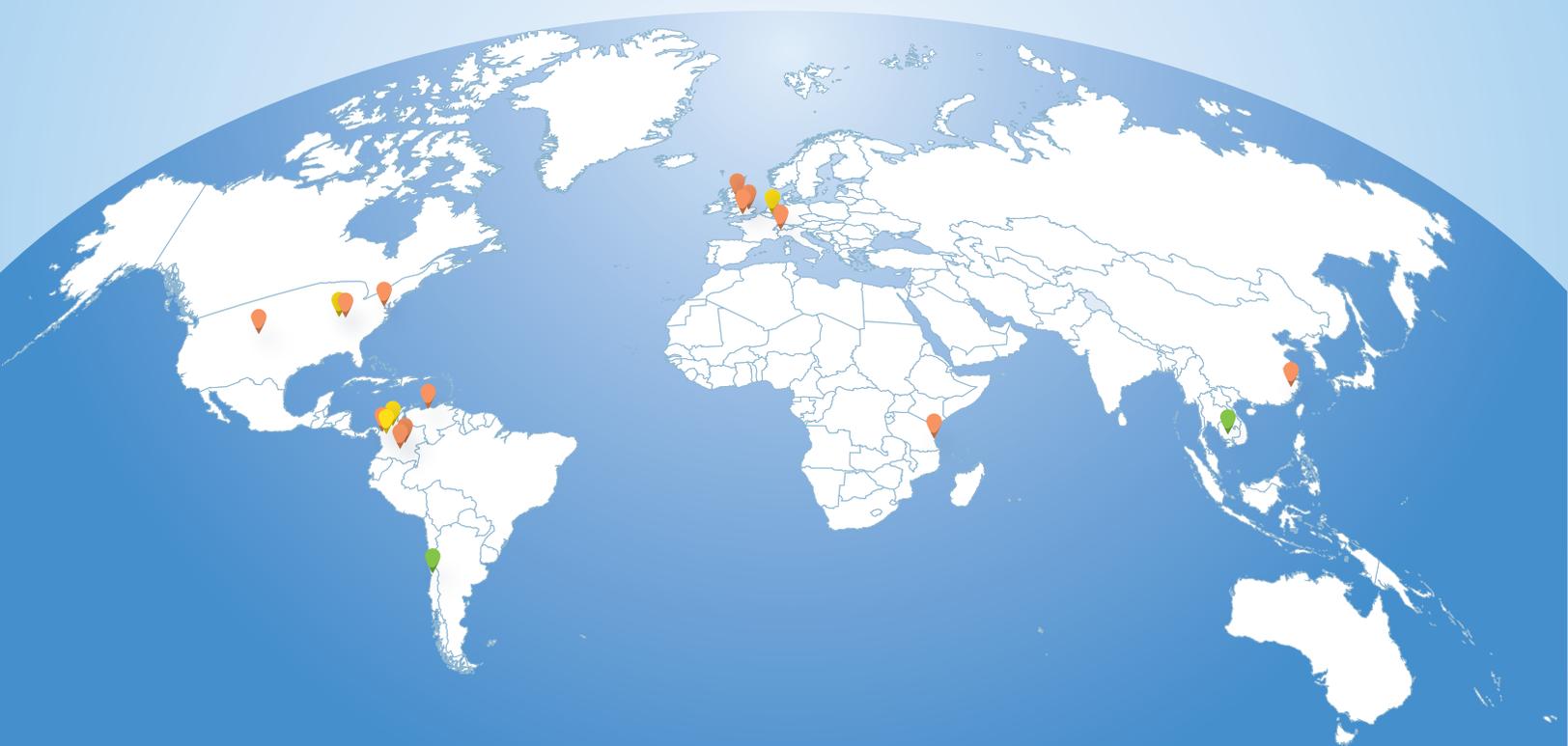
Meetings

Where the SSC Chair's office participated



Interventions

Letters sent to governments or companies to propose actions for species and habitats under threat.



RECENT ACTIVITIES

Meetings

(Jon Paul Rodríguez, JPR; Domitilla Raimondo, DR; Rachel Hoffmann, RH; Kira Mileham, KM; Bibiana Sucre, BS; Orlando Salamanca, OS; Rob Bullock, RB)

- *National Biodiversity Observation Networks Meeting*. Alexander von Humboldt Institute. Participants came from Colombia (Humboldt), South Africa (SANBI) and GeoBON. 18-20 July, Bogotá, Colombia (DR).
- *Western Indian Ocean marine fishes Red List assessment workshop*. 14-23 July, Zanzibar, Tanzania (RB).
- *IUCN Species Survival Commission Steering Committee*. July 31 – August 4, Cartagena, Colombia (JPR, DR, RH, KM, BS, OS, RB).
- *Facilitated an IUCN Red List Species Assessment Training Course for Colombian Biologists*. 4-6 August, Villa de Leyva, Colombia (DR).
- *Brainstorming Meeting: post-2020 biodiversity framework*. IUCN Headquarters. 18 August, Gland (JPR attended by Skype).
- *Meetings with Global Wildlife Conservation and National Geographic Society*. 23 August, Washington, DC (JPR, KM).
- *Indianapolis Prize Jury*. 14 September (JPR attended by Skype).
- *Conservation and Literacy Strategy Meeting with Unite for Literacy*. 5-6 September, Fort Collins, Colorado, United States (KM).
- *Invertebrate Conservation Sub-Committee Meeting*. 7-8 September, Cambridge, United Kingdom (RH).
- *Meeting of the KBA Partnership*. 12-14 September, Cambridge, United Kingdom (RH).
- *Red List assessor training course for SeaLife London Aquarium partnership*. 14-15th September, Hull, United Kingdom (RB).
- *Asian Regional Members Committee of IUCN*. 18-20 September, Zhejiang, China (Yan Xie, representing SSC).
- *Inauguration of the SSC Office at Provita's headquarters*. 20 September, Caracas, Venezuela (JPR, BS, OS).

Conferences

(Jon Paul Rodríguez, JPR; Rachel Hoffmann, RH; Kira Mileham, KM; Bibiana Sucre, BS; Rob Bullock, RB)

- *28th International Congress for Conservation Biology*. DR co facilitated a symposium on Plant Conservation in MegaDiverse Countries. 23-27 July, Cartagena, Colombia (JPR, DR, BS).
- *Train Education for Nature Program and Conservation Leadership Programme alumni event*. Whitley Fund for Nature, WWF Russell E. 25 July, Cartagena, Colombia (JPR, BS).
- *AZA Association of Zoos and Aquariums Annual Conference*. 9-14 September, Indianapolis, United States (KM).
- *EAZA European Association of Zoos and Aquaria Annual Conference*. 17-23 September, Emmen, Netherlands (KM).

Conservation Interventions

High-level interventions address conservation issues of serious concern, through letters to governments or companies which highlight species and habitats under threat, and propose actions on their behalf. Each letter provides the necessary background and technical information, and a thorough review process led by Rachel Hoffmann, engaging the appropriate Specialist Groups, experts across the network, the IUCN regional offices and IUCN programmes.

- **Environmental impacts of the proposed Sambor and Stung Treng hydropower dams on the Mekong River, 17 August 2017.** A jointly signed letter by Inger Andersen and Jon Paul Rodríguez was sent to the Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia to express concern about the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Sambor and Stung Treng hydropower dams on the Mekong River. The Mekong maintains some of the world's richest biological diversity. This includes numerous species that are already close to extinction. Of particular concern are the "river giants," such as the Critically Endangered Mekong River population of dolphins and the Mekong giant catfish, as well as endangered giant carp, stingrays and turtles that live and reproduce in the river. The lower Mekong provides habitat for about 850 different fish species, 135 of which migrate up and down the overall river system. Large dams have been shown to reduce fish diversity and block the migratory movements of many species, in some cases causing their extinction and the loss of valuable fisheries, thereby also jeopardizing food security.
The issue was brought to the attention of the SSC Chair's Office by the Cetacean Specialist Group who played a key role in providing the relevant facts and information for the basis of the letter. Also, with the assistance of the IUCN Asia Regional Office and the IUCN Water Programme, the letter focused on striking a balance between recognizing the imperative of Cambodia's energy development to meet the needs of the Cambodian people and benefit the country's economy, while preserving a healthy and diverse environment with abundant wild species and healthy biodiversity.
- **Advanced plans to flood the Ñuble river basin east of the town of San Fabian de Alico in the Maule Region, 25 September, 2017.** The Chair of the Conifer Specialist Group, Martin Gardner, highlighted an urgent issue regarding plans for two hydroelectric projects – Embalse Punilla and Central Ñuble de Pasada – in an area designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 2011 and which forms part of the "Corredor Biológico Nevados de Chillán Laguna del Laja". In a letter to the Man and Biosphere Programme of UNESCO, signed by the Chair of the SSC, the cultural, social and environmental impacts of the two schemes were outlined, including the loss of 1,720 hectares of native forest and 11 archaeological sites as well as displacement of about 100 families. This area is also a very important refuge for the globally Endangered Patagonian Huemul (*Hippocamelus bisulcus*). The purpose of the letter was to ensure UNESCO is fully aware of the situation in one of its most important Chilean Biosphere Reserves, with an assurance that everything possible is being done to make the Chilean authorities aware of the potential devastating effect on the biodiversity in the Ñuble river basin if the hydroelectric scheme goes ahead.

“A JUST WORLD THAT VALUES AND CONSERVES
NATURE THROUGH POSITIVE ACTION TO REDUCE
THE LOSS OF DIVERSITY OF LIFE ON EARTH”.



Common seahorse, *Hippocampus kuda*, VU
Photo © OCEANA-Carlos Suárez



Who shapes the SSC? Some Reflections on George Rabb

By Simon Stuart

I first met George Rabb at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in October 1985 when I was interviewed for the position of Species Programme Officer at IUCN. George was on the panel – I don't remember much of the interview, except that I got the job, and IUCN has defined my career ever since.

George was already a dominant force on the SSC Steering Committee by the time I joined IUCN. I attended my first Steering Committee meeting in March 1986, and that was when I really started to get to know George, with the first of our many one-to-one in-depth conversations. His extraordinary intellect, his deep ethical commitment to conservation, and his breadth of interests marked him as an influential force to be reckoned with.

George became Chair of SSC in August 1989, and served until 1996. The SSC's standing within the wider IUCN family grew enormously under George's leadership. George brought about many changes during his time as SSC Chair. He brought many new and younger people from across the world on to the Steering Committee, improved its gender balance, and established many new Specialist Groups. Some of the most active SGs in SSC today, were established under George's leadership; he also started the process to make the SGs much

more proactive, as we see today. George knew that his effectiveness grew from surrounding himself with top-calibre people. Compared with any SSC Chair before him, George built up a significant support team. George and his team worked in seamless unity with the IUCN Secretariat Species Programme team that I was leading at the time.

George was not a typical leader. In many ways he was a shy and self-effacing man. He never sought to be the centre of attention and always gave great credit to others. But when a topic arose about which he cared passionately, he could speak with passion and conviction. Although he played the IUCN political game, George was never a politician in a scheming or tactical sense. He avoided other people's controversies and was reluctant to trade votes in the IUCN Congress to get his own way. George was more of a conviction politician, fighting for things he believed to be morally right and opposing things that he believed to be wrong. He also had courage.

George pursued many conservation passions during his long life. He loved the Okapi, and this led to an abiding interest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the research station at Epulu. When all the captive animals at the station were killed in 2012 during the

terrible civil strife in that suffering country, George was heartbroken, but characteristically also took the initiative in generating a constructive response. He got a late emergency motion submitted and adopted at the 2012 IUCN Congress, calling for urgent assistance for Okapi conservation. The publication of the SSC Okapi Action Plan in 2016, a joint initiative with the DRC Government, followed on from this call. His earlier natural history exploits have faded with time, but remain remarkable. For example, he discovered several species of salamander in Mexico in the 1950s, published a paper on wolf social behaviour in 1967, and was one of the last people to see Bachman's Warbler in the field.

George was also heavily involved in the SSC Conservation Breeding SG and in other organizations. He was a board member of the Center for Humans and Nature, Defenders of Wildlife, and many others. He was a prime mover of the Chicago Wilderness initiative, showing his ability to focus on both the local and the global. He had an abiding interest in environmental ethics and was heavily involved in the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law's Ethics Specialist Group. George became the unofficial leader of the zoo community within IUCN; he was a pioneer of the movement to bringing zoos more fully into conservation.

Despite all of these interests and achievements, George's largest single contribution was to amphibian conservation. It is no exaggeration to say that George was the founder of the amphibian conservation movement. At the First World Herpetological Congress in 1989, the alarm bell of unexplained and dramatic amphibian declines and extinctions taking place around the world was first sounded. This could have resulted in a shocked scientific world with no follow-up action. However, George had the vision and leadership to turn the alarm bell into a clarion call to mobilize action. As a direct result, the global amphibian conservation movement started to develop, focused on both understanding the science and the scale of the problem, and then working on conservation solutions. It is for this reason that an Amphibian Conservation Fund will soon be launched in George's honour, something that George agreed to in his usual self-deprecatory manner shortly before his last illness.

Another remarkable characteristic of George was his ability to stay on top of the scientific literature, right up until the end. He was constantly looking forward to the next challenges. In the last few months of his life he became a strong advocate of exploring the potential of new genetic technology to develop solutions in the fight against amphibian disease.

Probably more people would describe George as their mentor than anyone else I can imagine. I am proud to be one of them. But strangely enough, I don't think George ever set out to be an intentional mentor of anyone. He just became a mentor by his example, his ethics, his commitment, his constant challenging of us, and his kindness. George was not always easy on his mentees. He could be irascible and impatient at times, but it was all for the greater conservation cause.

It is hard to imagine life now without George. He is irreplaceable, but he also leaves a tremendous legacy. When the news about his passing came, there was much sadness all across the world from the thousands of people whose lives had been touched by George.

Thank you George for being there for me every step of the way these past 32 years. I will miss you hugely but count myself as hugely blessed by having you as part of my life.



Panorama of coral bleaching in the Maldives during May 2016
Photo © The Ocean Agency / XL Catlin Seaview Survey

WHAT CAN THE CORAL SPECIALIST GROUP DO?

David Obura

*Chair of the Coral Specialist Group
CORDIO East Africa, dobura@cordioea.net*

What can the Coral SG do? We focus on an invertebrate, the conservation needs of reefs are more ecological and integrative than species-oriented, there is a vast community already working on reef conservation, and how can we get SG members, all active and busy scientists and some managers, to be invested in the SSC? Meanwhile our system is accelerating off the cliff faster than others, requiring profound changes in management¹, policy² and the way we run business³ to avoid the worst outcomes.

The Coral SG is relatively new, having started after the red listing of corals and IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2008, and so far has remained relatively small. We have contributed in some classic ways, such as when asked by IUCN to provide advice for CITES and the CBD, in red listing of European and Mediterranean corals, and in the Endangered Species Act listing of corals in the USA in 2013. Within the SSC we've channeled mainly through the Marine Conservation Sub-Committee rather than its Invertebrate counterpart, perhaps reflecting the boundaries that inevitably exist between domains and disciplines.

¹ Hughes, TP. et al. 2017. Coral reefs in the Anthropocene. Nature 546 doi:10.1038/nature22901

² Heron et al. 2017. Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Coral Reefs: A First Global Scientific Assessment. Paris, UNESCO World Heritage Centre

³ Obura, DO 2017. Refilling the coral reef glass. Science 22 Sep 2017: Vol. 357, Issue 63567. Editorial.



The challenge for me as a Chair has been to identify what a Coral SG can do in particular, that isn't already being done in such a filled space as the coral reef world.

One thing we are trying is an illustration of what may work, noting that this does not describe the SG or its potential as a whole. This is focused on integrating many strands – thinking “One Programme” to link species and ecosystem work, research and action, influencing policy, and working from the bedrock of current science and practical knowledge to advise and even advocate for preferred actions.

There is, broadly speaking, a global coral reef “community of practice,” one component of which consolidates monitoring of reef state from thousands of locations to a single national, regional or global number, in the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. In the past, IUCN supported the GCRMN through the Marine Programme, and the SG has taken on the mantle to focus on the challenge of how to get information aggregated and reported in a way that feeds many needs, from local managers to Aichi Targets. In this, best practice from other systems, developed through GEOBON and the Global Ocean Observing System will be applied, as well as integration with e.g. the Ocean Biogeographic Information System, to approach open data standards.

We are trying this in a way that leverages all parts of IUCN – its membership of countries and committed organizations, SSC experts, and multiple internal organs. Among SGs, some examples are the Species Monitoring and Climate Change, and we will reach out to Sustainable Use and Livelihoods, and Conservation

Planning. Across Commissions, we try to connect with the ecosystem approach, protected areas and balance economic and social needs around coral reefs.

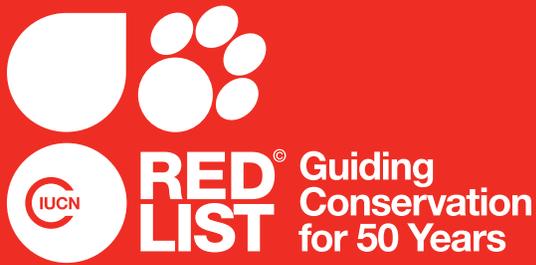
It is yet early days in putting this together, but the need is urgent. Institutional processes and funding are the major current challenges, which of course needs to change as quickly as possible to have an impact on the time scales needed for coral reefs. Internally, IUCN has set a target for 2020 to update the red list of coral species, and implement Recommendation 106 from the last congress calling for “Cooperation for the protection of coral reefs worldwide”. The Aichi Targets mention coral reefs as a flagship ecosystem and the issues around coral reefs are a microcosm for achieving the SDGs as an indivisible set.

The Coral SG hopes to step up to contribute the best it can to this challenge, but will need a great deal of collaboration, engagement and support across the whole IUCN family.



Popcorn Coral

Photo © Richard Vevers - The Ocean Agency / XL Catlin Seaview Survey



DO YOU HAVE AN IDEA OR A CONCERN ABOUT THE RED LIST?

By: Resit Akçakaya

Chair, Red List Standards and Petitions Sub-committee

SSC members, and the scientific community in general, play a crucial role in advancing the scientific foundations of extinction risk assessment through the IUCN Red List. New research by SSC members and others forms the basis for updates to the [Guidelines for Using the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria](#) developed by the Red List Standards and Petitions Sub-committee (SPSC). We thank the SSC members who have engaged in this process through publications, discussions, and applications.

I would like to encourage all SSC members to discuss their ideas and concerns about the Red List with the SPSC before submitting them for publication. This is especially important if your ideas involve generalizations about the Red List criteria, or suggest ways of improving them. A discussion with the SPSC would be the fastest way your concerns can be addressed and your ideas can be incorporated into Red List assessments. Due to its long and active role in developing and maintaining the guidelines to support

applications to the full range of taxa, the SPSC is usually better equipped than regular journal reviewers to offer insights into the interpretation of the Red List criteria.

It is important to emphasize that this invitation for discussion does not preclude anyone submitting or publishing any idea related to the Red List criteria. Rather, discussions with the SPSC can (a) help clarify misconceptions prior to submission, (b) let you know about any prior discussion relevant to your ideas, and (c) make the SPSC aware of your work so that any applicable changes to the guidelines are made without delay.

In contrast, a "publish-first-ask-questions-later" approach is not particularly conducive to improving the Red List system. I understand the pressure, especially in academic settings, to publish. However, academic publications that recommend sweeping changes to an established system such as the Red List may be counter-productive, if they are based on misunderstandings of the criteria. Once published, such misunderstandings have a life of their own, and are difficult to correct, even with published responses (such as [Collen et al. 2016](#)). For example, several years ago a paper by an SSC member questioned the applicability of the Red List

criteria to a particular taxonomic group. This led to a published response as well as an extended discussion and additional clarifications to the guidelines about how the criteria should be applied to this group of taxa. These responses effectively resolved the concerns about the applicability of the criteria; however, the original claim is still being repeated (most recently in an IPBES assessment draft) to argue against the use of IUCN Red List data in conservation assessments for this group of organisms.

A discussion with the SPSC can also lead to a better understanding of the complex set of trade-offs, constraints, and other considerations involved in developing guidance for the application of the Red List Categories and Criteria. One of these considerations is the types of changes that are most useful, or even possible, for the Red List. Our committee can only change the Red List guidelines, which must follow, and not override, the criteria. The criteria were established after years of research, testing, and consultation, followed by adoption by IUCN's Council, which represents the IUCN membership of governments and NGOs. In order to maintain the same standard extinction risk benchmark through years and decades (so that we can follow the trend in

the status of biodiversity over time), the basic structure of the criteria, and more importantly, the relative risk levels implied by the threat categories, must remain constant. Thus, amendments to Guidelines that improve consistency of interpretation are always preferred to changing the criteria, given the need to maintain relative risk levels, and the requirement for any change to the criteria to be approved by the entire IUCN membership. This does not mean that new research does not contribute to our application of the criteria. It certainly does, as you can see by the almost yearly updates to the Red List guidelines. So far, the constraints have not prevented us from using recent scientific developments to improve the application of the criteria and thus to better estimate the risk of extinction within the context of the criteria.

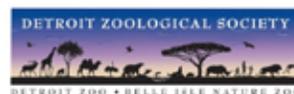
There are many areas where new research would help improve assessment of extinction risk under the Red List criteria. We listed some of these in a recent paper (Collen et al. 2016), and I am sure there are many others. We would like to invite all SSC members to help us with this process, by sharing their concerns and ideas, ideally before publishing them. The SPSC can be reached through:

redliststandardssubcommittee@ssc.iucn.org



Rhacophorus bifasciatus, NT
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