



# The IUCN Species Survival Commission

QUARTERLY REPORT  
MARCH 2019



Western gorilla, *Gorilla gorilla*, CR  
Photo © AZA SAFE / Jacksonville Zoo



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A primary goal of the SSC Chair's Office is to catalyze conservation action by the members of the Commission. In 2018, National Geographic Society (NGS) and SSC established a partnership with precisely that purpose, by creating *Recovery of Species from the Brink of Extinction*, aimed at funding the implementation of *SSC action plans* and *related documents*. We report on the result of the first year of this partnership, which was joined by *Fondation Segré* in early 2019. The selection process was very competitive, with a 14% approval rate. Grants averaged ~34,000 US\$ and 57% of recipients were SSC members. Persuading the other 43% to join SSC and increasing proposals on plants, fishes, invertebrates, fungi and lichens are at the top of our priority list for the next round of proposals (9 October 2019). We are very grateful to NGS and *Fondation Segré* for helping us close the *Species Conservation Cycle* and support conservation action.

In parallel, we launched a *small internal grant* initiative, to support needs identified by SSC Groups during the collection on information for the SSC Data process. Funds were generously provided by



Leatherback sea turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, VU  
Photo © David Southall

the *Environment Agency* – Abu Dhabi, as part of their support to the SSC Chair's Office and their encouragement of strategic investment in the SSC Network. The next round will open in June, 2019, and focus on Plan, Act and Communicate.

Joining forces with yet other partners continues to be an ongoing SSC priority. Kayla Ripple of the *Association of Zoos and Aquariums* (AZA), reminds us of the role of the *ex situ* community in recovering species from the brink of extinction. But more importantly, she urges SSC Specialist Groups to join forces with AZA SAFE (*Saving Animals From Extinction*), and move forward together.

Colleagues from the Boa and Python, Crocodile, Monitor Lizard, and Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Groups (among other groups!) express their concern for the recent moves within the international fashion industry to ban leather from sustainably sourced reptiles. They argue that skins from well-managed, exploited populations of crocodiles, lizards and snakes, provide incentives for conservation and have actually achieved remarkable recoveries in the wild. Evidence shows that import bans can actually harm species, as well as the well-being of indigenous and local communities.

We close this *Quarterly Report* with Inger Andersen, Director General of IUCN. Inger joined the Union in 2015, and will move to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in June, 2019, to become Executive Director. She reflects on the lessons learned during her tenure and her vision for IUCN into the future. It has been a pleasure for SSC to work with Inger during these four years, and we look forward to expanding our engagement with UNEP in the years to come. Good luck!

## Resumen ejecutivo

Uno de los principales objetivos de la oficina de CSE es catalizar acciones de conservación entre los miembros de la Comisión. Con este fin, en 2018, National Geographic Society (NGS) y la Comisión para la Supervivencia de las Especies (CSE) se aliaron para crear la convocatoria *Recovery of Species from the Brink of Extinction*, destinada a financiar la implementación de los [planes de acción de CSE](#) y [documentos relacionados](#). En el presente reporte informamos los resultados del primer año de esta alianza, a la que se unió *Fondation Segré* a inicios de 2019. El proceso de selección fue bastante competitivo, con una tasa de aprobación del 14%. Además, las subvenciones promediaron US \$34.000 entregados, siendo el 57% de los beneficiarios miembros de CSE. Nuestra prioridad para la próxima ronda de propuestas (9 Octubre 2019) es incrementar el número de postulaciones de los grupos especialistas de plantas, peces, invertebrados, hongos y líquenes, así como motivar al otro 43% a unirse a CSE. Estamos muy agradecidos con NGS y *Fondation Segré* por apoyarnos a afianzar el [Ciclo de Conservación de Especies](#) y soportar las acciones de conservación.

Simultáneamente lanzamos una iniciativa de [pequeños financiamientos](#), a lo interno de la comisión, para apoyar las necesidades identificadas por los grupos especialistas durante el levantamiento del SSC Data. Los fondos destinados a estas becas fueron provistos por la *Environment Agency* – Abu Dabi, como parte de su contribución a la oficina de CSE y con el fin de motivar la inversión estratégica de la red. La próxima ronda abrirá en Junio 2019, y se enfocará en los componentes de Planificación, Acción y Comunicación.

Unir esfuerzos con otros aliados de CSE sigue siendo una prioridad. Kayla Ripple de la Asociación de Zoológicos y Acuarios (*Association of Zoos and Aquariums*, AZA), nos recuerda el papel de la comunidad *ex situ* en la recuperación de especies al borde

de la extinción. Aún más importante, invita a los grupos especialistas de CSE a unir esfuerzos con AZA SAFE (*Saving Animals From Extinction*).

Colegas de los grupos especialistas de Boa y Pitón, Cocodrilos, Lagarto Monitor y, Uso Sostenible y Medios de Vida (entre otros) expresaron su preocupación por la reciente movida en la industria de la moda para prohibir el uso de la piel, de origen sostenible, de estos reptiles. Argumentan que la recolección de pieles de poblaciones bien manejadas como los cocodrilos, lagartos y serpientes, proporciona incentivos para la conservación; y han logrado notables recuperaciones en la naturaleza. La evidencia muestra que las prohibiciones de importación pueden dañar a las especies, así como el bienestar de las comunidades indígenas y locales.

Cerramos este reporte trimestral con una entrevista a Inger Andersen, Directora General de UICN. Inger se unió a la Unión en el 2015, y próximamente se convertirá en la Directora Ejecutiva del Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Ambiente (UNEP), en Junio. En la entrevista, reflexiona sobre las lecciones aprendidas durante su mandato y su visión de UICN en el futuro. Ha sido un placer para CSE trabajar con Inger durante estos cuatro años, y esperamos expandir nuestro compromiso con la UNEP en los próximos años. ¡Buena suerte!

## Résumé

Le bureau du président de la CSE a pour objectif principal de catalyser les mesures de conservation prises par les membres de la Commission. En 2018, National Geographic Society (NGS) et CSE ont établi un partenariat dans ce but, en créant le [programme récupération des espèces au bord de l'extinction](#), visant à financer la mise en œuvre des [plans d'action](#) de la CSE et des [documents connexes](#). Nous rapportons le résultat de la première année de ce partenariat auquel la [Fondation Segré](#) a adhéré depuis le début de l'année 2019. Le processus de sélection était très compétitif, avec un taux d'approbation de 14%. Les subventions ont atteint en moyenne d'environ ~34 000 USD\$ et 57% des bénéficiaires étaient membres de CSE. Persuader les 43% restants d'adhérer à la CSE et multiplier les propositions concernant les plantes, les poissons, les invertébrés, les champignons et les lichens figurent en tête de notre liste de priorités pour la prochaine série de propositions (9 Octobre 2019). Nous sommes très reconnaissants à la NGS et à la [Fondation Segré](#) de nous avoir aidés à clôturer le [cycle de conservation des espèces](#) et à soutenir les actions de conservation.

En parallèle, nous avons lancé une petite initiative de [subvention interne](#) afin de répondre aux besoins identifiés par les groupes de CSE lors de la prise d'informations pour le processus de collecte de données de CSE. Les fonds ont été généreusement fournis par [l'Agence Environnementale](#) d'Abu Dhabi dans le cadre de son soutien au bureau du président de la CSE et de leur encouragement à investir de manière stratégique dans le réseau de la CSE. La prochaine session s'ouvrira en juin 2019 et consistera à planifier, agir et communiquer.

L'union des forces avec d'autres partenaires reste une priorité permanente de la CSE. Kayla Ripple, de [l'Association des Zoos et Aquariums](#) (AZA), nous rappelle le rôle de la communauté *ex situ* dans la récupération des espèces au bord de l'extinction. Mais plus important encore, elle exhorte les groupes de spécialistes de la CSE à unir leurs efforts avec AZA SAE ([Sauver les Animaux de l'Extinction](#)), à unir leurs forces et à progresser ensemble.

Des collègues des groupes de spécialistes boa et python, crocodile, lézard moniteur et de l'utilisation durable et des moyens de subsistance (entre autres!) ont exprimé leur préoccupation devant les récentes mesures prises par l'industrie de la mode internationale d'interdire le cuir des reptiles issus de sources durables. Ils affirment que les peaux provenant des populations de crocodiles, de lézards et de serpents bien gérées et exploitées constituent des incitations à la conservation et ont en fait permis des récupérations remarquables dans la nature. Les preuves montrent que les interdictions d'importation peuvent effectivement nuire aux espèces, ainsi qu'au bien-être des communautés autochtones et locales.

Nous clôturons ce rapport trimestriel avec Inger Andersen, Directrice Générale de l'UICN. Inger a rejoint l'Union en 2015 et passera au Programme des Nations Unies pour l'Environnement (PNUE) en juin 2019 pour devenir Directeur Exécutif. Elle réfléchit aux leçons apprises au cours de son mandat et à sa vision future de l'UICN. Ce fut un plaisir pour CSE de travailler avec Inger au cours de ces quatre années et nous sommes impatients de renforcer notre engagement avec PNUE dans les années à venir. Bonne chance!

# RECENT ACTIVITIES



## MEETINGS

WHERE THE SSC  
CHAIR'S OFFICE  
PARTICIPATED



## CONFERENCES

WHERE THE SSC CHAIR'S  
OFFICE ATTENDED OR  
OFFERED A LECTURE





## Meetings and conferences

### MEETINGS

(Jon Paul Rodríguez, JPR; Domitilla Raimondo, DR; Rachel Hoffmann, RH; Kira Mileham, KM; Simeon Bezeng, SB)

- *Funding meeting with the French Development Agency*, 15 January 2019, Johannesburg, South Africa. (DR, SB)
- *WAZA Meeting: Towards a vision for a Global Species Congress*, 25 January 2019, Bronx Zoo, New York, USA. (KM)
- *KBA Committee Meeting*, 29-31 January 2019, IUCN Headquarters, Gland, Switzerland. (JPR)
- *Ecosystem assessment workshop*, 29 January - 01 February 2019, Adama, Ethiopia. (DR, SB)
- *Funding and stakeholder engagement meeting*, 04-05 February 2019, Nairobi, Kenya. (DR, SB)
- *WWF Fuller Seminar: The Role of Conservation Breeding in Conservation*, Panelist. 7 February 2019, Washington DC, USA. (KM)
- *SA KBA review workshop at SANBI*, 12-13 February 2019, Cape Town, South Africa. (DR, SB)
- *Decision Science Working Group*, 16 February, Cambridge, UK. (RH)
- *SSC Network Coordination meeting*, 20-22 February, Gland, Switzerland. (RH)

- *DEFRA - IWT / IUCN Evidence meeting*, 25 February, Cambridge, UK. (RH)
- *BIOPAMA state of protected areas workshop*, 26-27 February 2019, Johannesburg, South Africa. (DR, SB)
- *2nd Asian Rhino Range States Meeting*, 26-28 February 2019, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Wildlife Division, New Delhi, India. (JPR)
- *Meeting of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group*, 28 February 2019, WWF-India, New Delhi, India. (JPR)
- *World Wildlife Day, UN Event*, 01 March 2019, New York, USA. (KM)
- *96th Meeting of the IUCN Council*, 28-31 March 2019, IUCN Headquarters, Gland, Switzerland. (JPR)

## CONFERENCES

(Jon Paul Rodríguez, JPR)

- *Back from the brink: a unique role for zoos (aquariums and botanical gardens) in saving species from extinction*, Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute, 7 February 2019, Washington, DC, USA. (remote presentation) (JPR)
- *Más allá de la Lista Roja... primeros pasos de acción para la conservación*, 22 March 2019, Manejo de los recursos hídricos para la conservación de los ecosistemas, Centro de Convenciones del Hotel HEX, Managua, Nicaragua. (JPR)





Papyrus Wisp, *Agriocnemis palaeforma*, VU  
Photo © Hans-Joachim Clausnitzer

## Grant opportunities within SSC

Species Recovery RFP and SSC Internal Grant:  
two funding mechanisms specially designed  
to support activities of the Species Survival  
Commission network.

*One of the strategies that the SSC Chair's Office is implementing to support the SSC network during this quadrennium, is to develop models that can provide opportunities for a wide range of SSC groups at the same time. The Recovery of Species from the Brink of Extinction request for proposals and the SSC Internal Grant are two of them. On this article we examine the state of these funding opportunities and their impact on the SSC network until now.*

### Species Recovery request for proposals

This has been the first year of a wonderful partnership between National Geographic Society (NGS) and SSC in a grant opportunity that supports the recovery of species through the implementation of SSC Species Conservation Action Plans or that are endorsed by SSC Specialist Groups. Early 2019 [Fondation Segré](#) joined the alliance, further strengthening the capacity to fund proposals.

## More than 26 species being recovered

After its first year and with three rounds of applications closed, the balance is encouraging. US\$ 1,378,506 have been distributed in support of [40 conservation projects](#), selected among 285 proposals received. Primates, amphibians, vultures, bats, crocodiles, birds, and freshwater fishes, are just some of the taxa protected by the different award-winning projects, with representation in almost all taxonomic groups.

These 40 projects benefit more than 26 species and cover large taxonomic diversity, as shown on Figure 1. We've seen an increase in the number of proposals from underrepresented taxa, such as fishes and plants. However, fungi and lichens continue to be unrepresented, as no proposals have been received yet. Despite the bias present on the number of proposal submitted so far, the success rates per taxonomic groups show more balance.

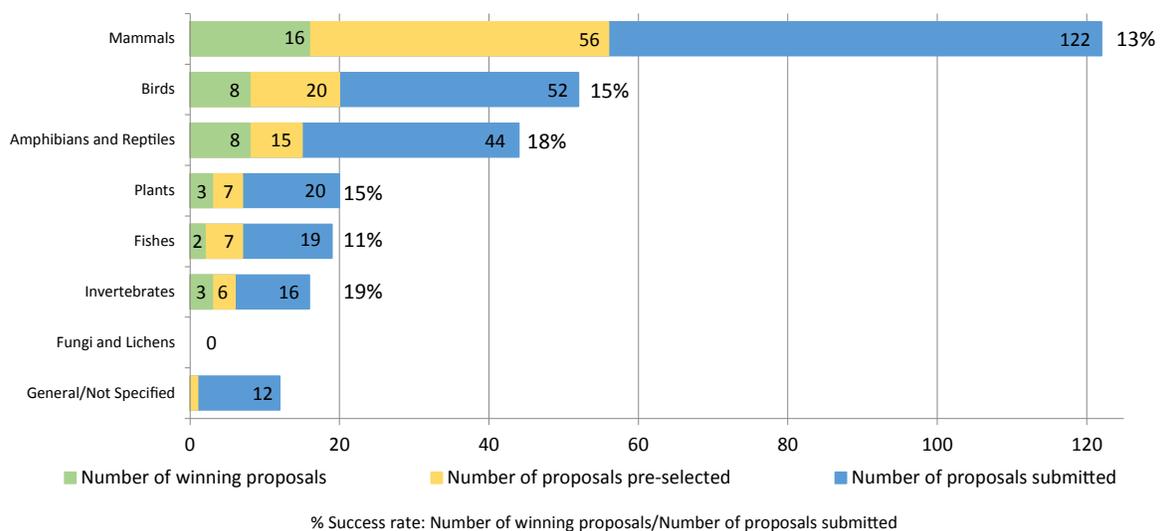


Figure 1. Proposals received, pre-selected, winning and success rates per taxonomic group, during the first three rounds of the Species Recovery RFP (2018).

In terms of the winning project leaders, we see a larger number of males than females, and also a larger number of SSC members than non-members (Figure 2). Still, we encourage more participation of the SSC network, particularly from underrepresented taxa such as plants, fishes, invertebrates, fungi and lichens. Regarding the geographical distribution we observe that the majority of winning proposals are located in America, followed by Asia, Africa and Europe almost in the same proportion.

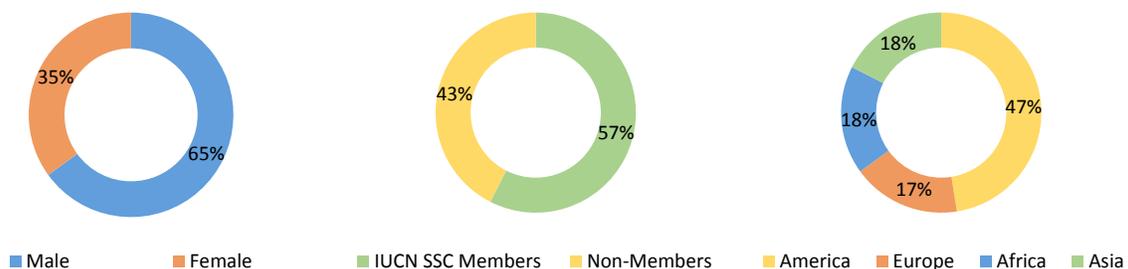


Figure 2. Grant winners by gender, SSC membership and region, during the first three rounds of the Species Recovery RFP (2018).

## Take part of the Species Recovery RFP

Towards the end of 2018, SSC and NGS co-organized two webinars to provide advice and answer questions from potential applicants. Both sessions were successful, with more than 110 attendees. As a result we prepared a compilation of [frequently asked questions \(FAQs\)](#) and a [video](#) for wide distribution within the SSC Network. Now we are planning two more webinars to be held during the third quarter of this year. Stay tuned to our [Facebook page](#) for the announcement and more information.

This grant opportunity works on a semestral basis, with applications opening again shortly after each deadline. The current round of applications closes on October 09, 2019. You can find out more about the grant and how to apply on [NGS' website](#). If you need assistance or have questions, please write to [speciesrecovery@ssc.iucn.org](mailto:speciesrecovery@ssc.iucn.org).

## SSC Internal Grant for small requests

Early this year the SSC Chair's Office launched a grant opportunity for funding small requests within the IUCN SSC network: the SSC Internal Grant, thanks to the generous support of Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi. This funding mechanism has three main goals:

- Support SSC groups in achieving their targets as established in their respective SSC Data and our [Species Strategic Plan 2017-2020](#), in alignment with our strategic framework: the Species Conservation Cycle.
- Encourage all SSC Groups to carry out their annual planning process using the SSC Data file, the monitoring and evaluation tool developed by the SSC Chair's Office. Having delivered their SSC Data is a requirement for accepting proposals from SSC groups.
- Motivate the SSC network to get more familiar with our strategic framework: the *Species Conservation Cycle*, and their components: *Network – Assess – Plan – Act – Communicate*.

## Results of the first round

Past February 7th, the first round of applications to the SSC Internal Grant closed with a response that exceeded our expectations. We received 47 proposals from all types of SSC Groups: Specialist Groups, Stand-alone Red List Authorities, Task Forces and Committees.

After an arduous review process, ten high quality proposals were chosen for funding, with a total of US\$ 33,208 allocated. The selection process took into consideration the priorities of the Species Strategic Plan 2017-2020, the funds available to allocate on this call, and the activities or groups that have greater or more urgent support needs, among other criteria. The full list of winners is presented below.

#	SSC group	Activity	Funds granted (US\$)
1	Colombian Plant Specialist Group	National workshop to review 300 plant species for Red List assessment and to discuss new Red List projects.	3,500.00
2	Mushroom, Bracket, and Puffball	Mesoamerican and Neotropical Mushroom Red List Assessment workshop.	3,440.00
3	Bryophyte Specialist Group	Training workshop on IUCN red-listing for members of the Bryophyte Specialist Group (BSG).	3,500.00
4	Temperate South American Plant Specialist Group	Workshop: Red list assessment of 66 species of trees of Northwestern Argentina.	3,000.00
5	Freshwater Fish Specialist Group	Red Listing workshop on freshwater fishes in the Southern Caucasus.	3,500.00
6	Dragonfly Specialist Group	Attending a Red List Trainer's Training Workshop in Cambridge.	3,488.00
7	Wild Pig Specialist Group	Two day workshop to evaluate the status of the conservation of five species and to identify research needs.	2,780.00
8	Spider and Scorpion Specialist Group	Workshop to provide free training on how to assess extinction risk using the IUCN Red List categories and criteria.	3,000.00
9	Macaronesian Island Plant Specialist Group	Workshop for updating group members' knowledge and practical skills on the application of the IUCN criteria for the evaluation of species conservation status.	3,500.00
10	Horseshoe Crab Specialist Group	Workshop to coordinate the preparation of the red list assessment for Horseshoe Crab species.	3,500.00
			<b>33,208.00</b>

This round was focused on two of the components of the Species Conservation Cycle: *Assess* –red list assessments and research activities– and *Network* –capacity building, meetings and synergy. In this opportunity, the funds were mainly requested for workshops, travels, and trainings, which are going to be developed during 2019. All these activities are related to targets included on the SSC Data presented by each group during 2018.

## Second round coming up

We will have two rounds of calls per year to the SSC Internal Grant. Next round of applications will be open on June and will be focused on the remaining components of our Species Conservation Cycle: *Plan, Act, and Communicate*. It means that we will fund requests related to:

- *Plan*: Development of conservation action plans and also policy initiatives.
- *Act*: Implementation of conservation action plans and technical advice on conservation actions.
- *Communicate*: Preparation of communication materials or mechanisms, and meetings.

For further information, please write to [nahomy.deandrade@ssc.iucn.org](mailto:nahomy.deandrade@ssc.iucn.org)



White-backed vulture, *Gyps africanus*, CR  
Photo © AZA SAFE / Tim Lewthwaite

## Aligning Actions to Save Species: AZA SAFE and IUCN SSC

Kayla Ripple

*AZA SAFE: Saving Animals From Extinction Coordinator*

### AZA Zoos and Aquariums in Conservation

As a required element of accreditation, organizations accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) prioritize impactful and sustainable conservation initiatives. Many support staff and other conservation practitioners in the field, and several Species Survival Plan® (SSP) programs have led conservation breeding programs and supplemented wild populations through reintroduction efforts. In several cases these efforts helped save species on the brink of extinction (e.g. black-footed ferrets, whooping cranes, and California condors). With more than 230 accredited institutions, and over 195 million visitors a year, what would happen if conservation staff, SSP program participants, educators, marketers, fundraisers and others at AZA facilities, alongside their visiting public, worked together to leverage their networks and unique resources for the conservation of even *more* endangered species? And what if they were to work in greater collaboration with IUCN SSC Specialist Groups to achieve this?



Western pond turtle release,  
*Acinemys marmorata*, VU  
Photo © AZA SAFE / Oregon Zoo



Loggerhead sea turtle release, *Caretta caretta*, VU  
Photo © AZA SAFE/North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher

## What is SAFE?

**AZA SAFE: Saving Animals From Extinction** was launched in 2015 to facilitate this collaboration. The program brings together conservation, community engagement, public awareness, and fundraising resources that AZA facilities have access to in the fight to save vulnerable species. Now with 20 **SAFE species programs** and growing, AZA members and field partners are working together to benefit species conservation regionally and globally for targeted impacts.

Members show a great deal of commitment to **propose** and develop a SAFE species program. To be eligible, members show that the species is threatened with extinction<sup>1</sup>, the species has an established recovery or conservation plan, and that appropriate stakeholders are identified and/or engaged. At least two AZA program partners must have a history of two or more years supporting the conservation of this species or taxonomic group.

Proposals are reviewed by members of AZA's Field Conservation Committee and staff and, once accepted, SAFE teams have six months to develop a three-year program plan that details actions the AZA community can take to fill gaps in areas needed to help protect and save species. SAFE program plans align their objectives and actions with existing recovery or management plans, many of which are IUCN action plans.

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<sup>1</sup> VU, EN, CR, or EW on the IUCN Red List; is listed at an equivalent threat level according to relevant government agencies; or protected under CITES I or II; or demonstrates science-based evidence that the species population is under extreme distress and has not yet been listed under recognized threat levels.

## SAFE and IUCN SSC Joining Forces

SAFE is a framework that enables collaborative and strategic approaches to conservation among AZA-accredited members. The framework was modeled upon the *Open Standards for Practices in Conservation* and the One Plan Approach proposed by the IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group (CPSG). SAFE emphasizes the contributions of all communities and stakeholders in conservation, and encourages AZA members to “expand the tent” to leverage the AZA community at full capacity with their partners in the field.

Many members of the AZA community are active members in IUCN SSC Specialist Groups or have worked closely with them. Now with SAFE, there is a mechanism to track priorities, and evaluate field impacts together. Here are just a few examples of how these groups have collaborated:

- Working with the IUCN SSC Vulture Specialist Group, the SAFE African vulture program identified nine objectives to “improve the population status of six target [African vulture] species in at least 25% of their African distribution by 2020.”
- In September 2018, the SAFE Shark and Ray program held a working meeting with AZA partners and *in situ* shark conservation experts including the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group chair, to help the AZA community advance priority chondrichthyan research over the next three years.
- Also in September 2018, five IUCN SSC Specialist Group chairs attended AZA’s Annual Conference in Seattle, participated in a SAFE Program Planning Workshop, and met with respective SAFE programs to build relationships, learn more about their programs, and work together to identify priorities for species conservation.
- In December 2018, the SAFE sea turtle program formed an advisory board and drafted conservation objectives with the IUCN SSC Marine Turtles Specialist Group, AZA members, and field research partners to save Kemp’s ridley and eastern Pacific leatherback sea turtles from unsustainable fishing practices, by protecting nesting sites, and through community engagement.
- AZA partners in three SAFE programs (African penguin, African vulture, and gorilla) have been recognized for their efforts to advance IUCN action plan priorities by receiving grant funding through National Geographic Species Recovery Fund, which only funds projects aligned with IUCN SSC priorities.

## Acting Now, Acting Together

Now, more than ever, we must all work together to save the biodiversity of our planet. Many of the strategies necessary to save species are already known, and methods to increase capacity and resources to do this are being developed. SAFE and ICUN SSC specialist groups are part of this movement; how will we continue to move forward together?





Reticulated and short-tailed python skins at a facility in Central Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo  
Photo © Jessica Lyons

## Is banning exotic leather bad for reptiles?

Dr Daniel Natusch, Prof. Grahame Webb, Prof. Richard Shine, Dr Rosie Cooney, Dr Dilys Roe, Mr Tomas Waller, Prof. Mike Archer, Prof. Lee Fitzgerald, Dr Pablo Siroski and Prof. Kartik Shanker

*All authors are members of IUCN SSC*

*Recent bans on the sale of leather from exotic reptiles such as crocodiles, lizards and snakes may seem beneficial for species conservation at first glance. But evidence shows that such bans can actually harm species, as well as indigenous and local communities—argue members of IUCN’s Species Survival Commission.*

In February 2019, the UK department store Selfridges banned the sale of products made from exotic skins, claiming improved ethics. While bans such as this one may well be motivated by supposed ethical concerns regarding animal welfare, the scientific rigour behind these decisions must be called into question.

As active conservationists and species specialists, within the world’s largest, oldest, and most prestigious conservation [organisation](#), we are alarmed by retailers’ decisions to implement outright bans on the sale of exotic leather, instead of marketing sustainably produced wildlife products. We strongly believe that the consequences of such bans for biodiversity and local livelihoods in developing countries should be brought to light. The morality and ethics should be judged in its entirety.

Sustainable use of natural resources lies at the core of [conservation](#) —most wildlife is outside strict protected areas, and for it to survive people need to be both motivated and empowered to conserve it. That means they need benefits: the central message is “use it or lose it”. Bans can —and often do— remove the value of biodiversity to the [detriment of populations](#), species, habitats and people. There is ample scientific evidence indicating that banning the sale of wildlife removes the value of biodiversity, and in turn fosters illegal trade and damages [local incentives](#) to protect populations of animals.

Over the past four decades, a global effort has been underway to shift uncontrolled exploitation of wildlife to sustainable systems that benefit species, landscapes, and the people that depend on and use biodiversity. Trade in reptile skins is mostly [legal](#), [sustainable](#) and [verifiable](#). It is regulated internationally by CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), and by tiers of domestic legislation in exporting and importing countries.



An indigenous collector captures a yellow anaconda in Argentina  
Photo © Emilio White



A Kadazan Dusun man pegs a reticulated python skin to dry in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo  
Photo © Daniel Natusch

Brands, designers and department stores play a critical role in providing [incentives for conservation programmes](#) around the world. For example, the luxury brand Loro Piana buys precious fibre from wild [vicuña in the Andes](#); a demand that has driven sustained and ongoing increases in the species over recent decades. Hermès and Louis Vuitton buy saltwater crocodile skins from an [Australian crocodile](#) population that has recovered from devastation back to near carrying capacity, with wild egg harvest incentivising habitat conservation and tolerance of this dangerous predator. Most luxury brands know the widespread benefits their use of precious skins provides. They study their supply chains, are aware of the livelihood benefits, steadily improve the processes involved to ensure high standards of welfare, and understand how conservation and sustainable use improve the natural world.

Yet it seems retail corporations are often misinformed. Animal rights organisations who pressure retailers to ban exotic leathers contribute little to wildlife conservation. These organisations frequently neglect to acknowledge the impact of their actions on those living with the species they aim to protect. They seem to prefer species go extinct rather than be utilised.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) [claims](#) that exotic skins are sourced from endangered species whose numbers in the wild are “drastically dwindling”. The Humane Society International claims that the decision by Selfridges was a “natural next step for a responsible retailer”, that will save “countless” crocodiles and snakes.

These claims are demonstrably wrong. They are misinformation that ignores scientific evidence.

In many countries, people tolerate and conserve dangerous animals —such as crocodiles and pythons— and their habitats, because the [income derived through](#) use compensates for the costs of living with them. Outside protected areas like national parks, habitats that cannot generate an income from the species comprising them are often converted to agriculture. Entire [species assemblages are lost](#) when this occurs. The [sustainable use of crocodile skins](#) is highly responsible and one of the greatest conservation success stories on Earth. In places such as [Australia](#), the USA, Mexico, Kenya, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Peru, Papua New Guinea and Bolivia, local people have and are supporting the recovery of wild crocodile populations because they were given an economic value. These are often indigenous people in remote places, drawing on traditional knowledge in management, and returns from sustainable crocodile harvest often constitute one of their only sources of cash income —money that is crucial to pay for food, medicines, and school fees. When a species’ commercial value is removed through actions such as Selfridges’, so is the incentive for local people to tolerate them.



Aboriginal people examine saltwater crocodiles at a farm in the Northern Territory, Australia  
Photo © Mick Burns



Aboriginal people collecting saltwater crocodile eggs in the Northern Territory, Australia  
Photo © Grahame Webb



Women raise Burmese pythons at a small farm on Hainan Island, China  
Photo © Daniel Natusch

So we are deeply disappointed and extremely worried about Selfridges' decision. In 2016, Selfridges committed itself to ensuring that half of its products were "better for people and planet". There are ecological and social benefits from sourcing [exotic skins](#), including low environmental costs. Yet retailers like Selfridges stock and sell products made of synthetics and fossil fuels; materials that we know contribute to climate change, and [poison our waterways](#) and the fish we eat.

As conservation scientists, facing the challenges of wildlife conservation in the field, we are also disappointed with ourselves. In the face of decisions like those taken by Selfridges, and last year by [Chanel](#), it appears that we have been ineffective in communicating and informing industry as a whole about the benefits of using precious skins. We have tended to ignore fundamentalist dogma about animals, assuming that its deceptions were evident to all, rather than challenge it when it undermines conservation. We have, as a consequence, failed to help corporations like Selfridges understand the benefits of sustainably sourcing exotic leather.

So we are starting now. It is time for large corporates to hear the whole story. It is time they stop listening to misinformation and begin listening to credible voices. And it is time that we, as a global society, begin educating ourselves about what sustainability, morals and ethics truly look like.



Papuan people with saltwater crocodiles in the Sepik River, Papua New Guinea  
Photo © Keith K. Galgal



Event "Combating Marine Litter and Microplastics" at the UN in Geneva. Photo © IUCN

## Who Shapes The SSC?

### Interview with Inger Andersen, IUCN Director General

*With more than 30 years of experience leading projects focused on water, environment, and sustainable development, Inger Andersen has been Director General of IUCN since 2015. She was recently appointed to the post of Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) by the United Nations General Assembly and will be leaving IUCN by June. The SSC Chair's Office is excited about Inger's new role and wanted to know and share more about her experience and perspectives on IUCN.*

#### *What is IUCN's major strength in the context of the world's conservation community?*

IUCN is uniquely composed of civil society members, governmental members, scientific commissions and the Secretariat; this composition is key to achieve environmental action. Together we work to develop standards and policies. We work on the science and the knowledge of conservation, which gives us the capacity to speak based on evidence and bring a neutral, technical perspective to the table.

***"Conservation works, you just need to give nature half the chance and it will bounce back. We need nature more than nature needs us."***

Inger Andersen

## *What would you highlight as IUCN Commissions' primary role in the work of the Union?*

Our best-known and most unique product is arguably the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, largely based on contributions from over 150 IUCN SSC Specialist Groups, comprising over 8,500 experts, engaged on a volunteer basis. The IUCN Red List is the barometer of life on earth, assessing the extent to which plants, animals and fungi are threatened with extinction, as well as helping understand why. This extraordinary network of specialists is truly remarkable and has thus far delivered close to 100,000 species assessments. All countries and all governments use the IUCN Red List as a reference point. It is a knowledge product of which IUCN can be very proud.

But the work of IUCN, our Commissions and indeed the SSC is much more than that. IUCN's six Commissions set us apart from other organisations by the unrivalled magnitude and diversity of expertise that they comprise. For instance, much of what you see today in terms of environmental legislation came from the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL). Through WCEL, we have helped countries establish environmental legal frameworks and educated judges on how to advocate for the environment, among a plethora of other contributions.

Another Commission that has delivered massively would be the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). Working in collaboration with IUCN's Global Protected Areas Programme, WCPA provides guidance, standards, knowledge, and capacity building for enhanced management of parks and protected areas. And of course IUCN holds the unique role, enshrined in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, of providing guidance and advice on the inscription and status of natural World Heritage sites.

IUCN's pioneering work on Nature-based Solutions has been developed in collaboration with the Commission on Ecosystem Management. As a result, investing in ecosystems to provide human well-being and biodiversity benefits is now thoroughly integrated into environmental efforts worldwide. The Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy has been deeply engaged in collaboration with indigenous people and in the issue of environmental rights, which I believe will be ever more critical in the years ahead. Meanwhile, the Commission on Education and Communication works on public awareness and outreach, forging major initiatives, such as #Natureforall, which seeks to connect people of all age groups, but particularly the young, with nature.

## *What would you recommend to strengthen the integration of Commissions with the other components of IUCN?*

I think that an honest assessment should be made of the structure, set-up, functioning and impact of the Commissions. It is not always easy to challenge the status quo or to challenge the history and legacy of each of the Commissions. But I do not think that the structure and functioning of the Commissions have fully adapted to the current interconnected world, and I am sure that with the deployment of technology, of AI and of big data, much of the work of some of the Commissions could be fundamentally overhauled and modernised.

I also think that it is useful to assess whether these six Commissions as they exist today still respond to the evolving needs of nature conservation. We need to pose some uncomfortable questions: are the six areas covered by the six Commissions still the topics that the world needs answered? What are the impacts and results that each of

the Commissions has delivered? Again, uncomfortable questions. But if we are leaders who care deeply about conservation, then it is our duty to both pose the questions and to probe for the answers.

Further, I believe that we should ask these questions not of the six Commissions as a package, but of each of the six. Because some of the Commissions are still uniquely relevant and delivering both results and impact, while others have accomplished their missions and it might be time for a redesign or to consider sunset scenarios. It is clear that to pose such questions will take real leadership and this conversation should be a broad, non-defensive and inclusive dialogue under the leadership of the IUCN Council. Every organisation needs to move with the times and this includes questioning the basics from time to time.

### *What are your expectations for the 2020 IUCN World Conservation Congress?*

It's going to be a big one! The IUCN World Conservation Congress is the gathering place for the conservation movement; people come from all over the world and many different backgrounds, be it indigenous peoples, academics, governments, civil society organisations, private businesses or environmental lawyers, among others. Ten thousand people came to the 2016 IUCN Congress in Hawai'i.

We speak of 2020 as being a super year for conservation, and the Congress will certainly be a key moment.

*“The IUCN World Conservation Congress is the place where solutions are found, where conservation science is discussed and challenged and where the network is strengthened.”*

Inger Andersen

Why is 2020 a super year? The United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity agreed on biodiversity targets back in 2010 (the Aichi targets) and these targets expire in 2020. We know many of these targets will be achieved, but we will fall short on many others. The IUCN Congress will help decide what new targets should be set, how we will measure them and how we can bring them down to different scales, sectors and locations. Its outcomes will also carry the weight and legitimacy of IUCN's unique and diverse membership.

We will also be discussing how to build a roadmap for nature to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Biodiversity is often perceived as confined to just two of the 17 SDGs, but it is actually fundamental to the poverty, health and many other goals. We need to protect nature not just for its beauty and intrinsic value, which are absolutely imperative, but also from a very selfish point of view, and that is to protect humankind. This is the discussion that we will be having in Marseille, with a multitude of perspectives and a multitude of voices.

### *What was your biggest challenge during your time with IUCN? Any advice to the next DG?*

Speak the truths that science reveals to us. Do not allow yourself to be impacted by the political inconvenience that these truths might bring about. As Greta Thunberg says, we must “act as if the house is on fire, because it is”. For me, as well as for the next IUCN DG, this means an uncompromising emphasis on the imperative of

nature conservation, on combatting climate change and on proactively finding solutions to the continued degradation of our planetary support systems.

But in tackling these challenges, it is critical that IUCN understands that only emphasising nature conservation without addressing the underlying causes of this loss and degradation is a losing proposition. We know that species loss and nature degradation are a function of land-use changes, largely agriculture as well as urban development and infrastructure, and the associated fragmentation. But each of these – food, shelter and infrastructure – cannot be made the enemy. So as conservationists, we need to work on nature-positive agriculture, on nature-positive urban development and on nature-positive infrastructure. This is still a new area for IUCN, but it is my belief that unless we do this, IUCN risks falling into irrelevance.



*Are there any areas/topics that IUCN is not currently addressing, but that you believe expanding into would play to the Union's strengths?*

Yes, we need to have a significantly deeper understanding of the economic drivers of biodiversity loss and nature degradation. Or to put it differently, we need to build up IUCN's capacity for economic analysis of nature, of nature's wealth, of the economic policies that drive loss, and of the economic policy shifts that we need to recommend to ensure sustainability and viability of ecosystems and planetary integrity.

We also need to get better at understanding how nature conservation relates to what I refer to as "the current conversation". People vote and politicians make decisions on issues such as health policy, poverty reduction, conflict and peace, jobs and growth. So, if these are the issues that concern most citizens and on the basis of which most citizens and politicians take decisions, then we – as nature conservationists – must provide clear analysis and argumentation for how nature and nature's services can underpin enhanced health, poverty reduction, peaceful societies, job creation and economic stability. During my time at IUCN, we have moved forward on these issues. We have undertaken more economic analysis; we have sharpened our political economy analysis. But the job is not done until the day when nature and the wealth that nature provides is considered as critical a priority as other hot button issues of the day.

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