

## **WCC-2012-Res-019-EN**

### **Halting the loss of evolutionarily distinct lineages**

ALARMED that current extinction rates are 100 to 1,000 times higher than that shown by the fossil record and that 20% of vertebrates, 22% of plants, and most likely a comparable percentage of invertebrates, are threatened with extinction;

RECALLING that among mammals alone, at least 14 genera and four entire families have gone extinct since AD 1500;

RECOGNIZING that extinction does not occur randomly, but is clustered in families that contain only a small number of species, resulting in a much greater loss of evolutionary history than random extinction scenarios;

RECOGNIZING that distinct branches of the Tree of Life have often evolved traits and genes that are found in no other organisms and are therefore irreplaceable;

CONCERNED that the loss of these branches will result in an extremely reduced subset of genetic, evolutionary and ecological diversity;

ACKNOWLEDGING that resources currently available for conservation are insufficient to prevent the loss of large amounts of biodiversity and that conservation planners are forced to prioritize which species should receive the most conservation attention;

CONCERNED that many monotypic genera, families and even orders are overlooked by existing conservation prioritization schemes, putting at risk entire branches of the Tree of Life;

HIGHLIGHTING the recent probable extinction of the Yangtze River dolphin (*Lipotes vexillifer*), which represented over twenty million years of unique evolutionary history and was the sole representative of an entire mammal family (the Lipotidae);

ALARMED that every single member of a further 15 mammal families, two amphibian families and six bird families are threatened with extinction, along with both representatives of the Order Coelacanthiformes (Coelacanth); and that all seven species of sawfish are classified as Critically Endangered; and

CONCERNED that over 20 vertebrate families are represented by a single surviving species which is itself threatened with extinction;

### ***The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea, 6–15 September 2012:***

1. APPLAUDS the efforts of initiatives such as IUCN's Save Our Species Fund, the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, the Zoological Society of London's Evolutionary Distinct and Globally Endangered (EDGE) of Existence programme, the Amphibian Survival Alliance, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Global 200, US Fish and Wildlife Service's Endangered Species Grants and others to ensure that evolutionarily important lineages are targeted by in-country conservation efforts;
2. APPLAUDS the establishment of conservation strategies for evolutionarily important species such as the publication of *Conservation Strategy for the Pygmy Hippopotamus and Dugong: Status Report and Action Plans for Countries and Territories* and the re-launching of the Pangolin Specialist Group within the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC);

3. WELCOMES landscape-based and ecosystem-based approaches to the conservation of nature and natural resources but maintains that there is a need for complementary conservation initiatives that target species, especially those of high evolutionary significance;
4. REQUESTS that the Director General, SSC and all IUCN Members prioritize the conservation of threatened genera and families, by:
  - a. developing science-based tools and techniques;
  - b. undertaking further scientific exploration of species radiation/genetic variability and species distinctiveness, in order to refine objectives for species and evolutionarily distinct lineage protection; and
  - c. putting special emphasis on supporting capacity building efforts to reverse the decline of the important groups, while establishing clear priorities in light of climate change;
5. ENCOURAGES SSC and the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM), supported as needed by the Director General, to ensure that action plans are in place and being implemented for all targeted species and regions;
6. REQUESTS that the Director General brings the importance of conserving evolutionarily important lineages to the attention of major conventions (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), Ramsar Convention, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)) and governments to target evolutionarily distinct species and regions that contain high concentrations of these lineages;
7. REQUESTS that the international conservation community increases resource allocation to at-risk lineages and develops programmes of work around families and genera at risk of extinction in the near future; and
8. CALLS UPON all IUCN SSC Specialist Groups to assist in the formation of an objective indicator system to measure conservation success for these species by providing data for annual assessments of conservation need, action and effectiveness.

State and agency Members of the United States abstained during the vote on this Motion for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Resolutions Process.