

DRAFT Guidelines on the Implementation of the "IUCN Policy Statement on Research Involving Species at Risk of Extinction"

The Chair of the Species Survival Commission has circulated an important document with the note below.

This document has been prepared by the SSC Red List Committee, as a result of growing concerns that many Governments are prohibiting the scientific collection of species listed on the IUCN Red List, to the detriment of the conservation of the species in question. The long-term way to deal with this problem is to revise and update the IUCN Policy Statement on Research Involving Species at Risk of Extinction.

However, under IUCN's procedures, this is a time-consuming process, and it has become clear to us that many SSC members need some sort of statement earlier than this. As a result, we are proposing to issue guidelines on the existing Policy Statement, as an interim measure. The attached draft attempts to provide a balanced response to a complex issue. Please note that these guidelines are in no way an attempt to cover all aspects relating to scientific collecting. They focus only on scientific collecting as it relates to the IUCN Red List. *David Brackett, Chair, IUCN Species Survival Commission*

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DRAFT

Guidelines on the Implementation of the "IUCN Policy Statement on Research Involving Species at Risk of Extinction," with special reference to Scientific Collecting of Threatened Species

IUCN Species Survival Commission

Background

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) is responsible for maintaining the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* (referred to as the *IUCN Red List* below). Species are listed as threatened by IUCN through the application of scientifically-based quantitative criteria, and are assigned to the appropriate Red List Category, based on the level of threat that they face. For the most recent versions of the *IUCN Red List*, see Hilton-Taylor (2000) and IUCN (2002). Details of the Red List Categories and Criteria are available in IUCN (2001).

Governments around the world are taking increasing notice of the *IUCN Red List*. This has especially been the case since 1994, when IUCN introduced quantitative criteria in order to make the *IUCN Red List* more defensible and authoritative. The SSC welcomes the increased attention being given to the *IUCN Red List*, and encourages all governments and non-governmental organisations to give high priority to implementing conservation actions on behalf of all species listed as threatened by IUCN. However, the SSC is concerned about the way in which some governments are responding to *IUCN Red List* with respect to policies on scientific collecting, hence the need for these Guidelines.

IUCN has long recognised the need for care to be exercised by scientists when carrying out research on threatened species, as stated in the *IUCN Policy Statement on Research Involving Species at Risk of Extinction* (IUCN 1989). This statement encourages basic and applied research on threatened species that contributes to the likelihood of the survival of the species in question, and calls on scientists to avoid research that might impact negatively on populations of threatened species.

Here the SSC seeks to dispel some misconceptions about the role of research in general and scientific collecting in particular in the conservation of threatened species. Research is an essential component of any plan for the conservation of a threatened species. Research can inform us about the threats, appropriate management measures, population status, and population trends of threatened species. Governments and research institutions should therefore promote responsibly conducted research by qualified scientists on threatened species.

Scientific collecting is essential for monitoring population status as well as determining the causes of declines in many threatened species. In the 1960s, collection of bird eggs proved that DDT caused shell thinning and the consequent decline of many birds of prey. Collection of frogs in the 1990s led to the discovery of an emerging fungal disease causing sharp declines of amphibian populations.

Scientific collecting is essential for resolving the taxonomy of species, a prerequisite for sound conservation planning. These and many other examples underscore the importance of scientific collecting as a tool for advancing species conservation.

Many species listed are listed as threatened by IUCN, not because their wild populations are small, but because they are in serious decline, or because their geographic distributions are small. Such species can have sizeable wild populations, and because scientific collecting usually requires taking only a small number of specimens, its likely impact on such species tends to be very small. The main exceptions relate to species listed as Critically Endangered and Endangered under criteria C and D, and as Vulnerable under criterion D1; in these cases, the number of mature individuals in the wild is less than 2,500, and the impact of scientific collecting could be significant.

Guidelines

In the light of the above considerations, the IUCN Species Survival Commission recommends that:

1. In the spirit of the *IUCN Policy Statement on Research Involving Species at Risk of Extinction* (IUCN 1989), governments and research institutions should encourage and facilitate research on globally threatened species by qualified scientists to enhance our understanding of the natural history and conservation needs of these species.
2. Blanket prohibitions on research and the collection of scientific specimens of globally threatened species hinder conservation efforts, and governments should not impose them. Although careful review of any scientific research application is important, complex or time-consuming procedures for issuing research and collecting permits acts as a disincentive to the implementation of such research. Permit-issuing agencies should attach high priority to the timely review of applications related to threatened species.
3. Scientists working on globally threatened species should act responsibly to ensure that their research is directed towards enhancing the conservation status of the species that they are studying, and they should ensure that:
 - a. the material they need is not already available in museum or other institution collections, and
 - b. they do not collect more than the minimum number of specimens necessary for the accomplishment of their research.
4. In the case of species listed as Vulnerable under criterion D1, or Endangered under criterion C, scientists should provide evidence to permit-issuing agencies that the number of specimens that they wish to collect is very unlikely to increase the risk of extinction of the species in question, and that the research proposed is important for advancing conservation.
5. In the case of species listed as Critically Endangered under criteria C or D, and as Endangered under criterion D, the lethal collection of scientific specimens (i.e., collections that involve killing of wild individuals within the population) should not normally take place, and should only be permitted when it is clear that the research proposed is essential for enhancing the survival of the species.
6. In issuing permits for the scientific collection of species listed as Vulnerable under criterion D1 and Endangered and Critically Endangered under criteria C or D, permit-issuing agencies should take into account the cumulative effects of scientific collecting, and should not consider each permit application relating to the same species independently from each other.

References

- Hilton-Taylor, C. (2000) (compiler). *2000 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.
- IUCN (1989). *IUCN Policy Statement on Research Involving Species at Risk of Extinction*. IUCN: Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.
- IUCN (2001). *IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria: Version 3.1*. IUCN: Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK.
- IUCN 2002. *2002 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*. <<http://www.redlist.org>>. Downloaded on 14 August 2002.