

IUCN SSC Viper Specialist Group



2018 Report



Chris Jenkins



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Co-Chairs

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Red List Authority Coordinator

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Location/Affiliation

(1) Orianne Society, Tiger, Georgia, US
(2) Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes, Mexico
(3) University of Freiburg, Germany

Number of members

172

Social networks

Facebook:
Viper Specialist Group



Mission statement

The Viper Specialist Group (VSG) is a platform from which conservation biologists can work to increase our scientific understanding of viper biology and can implement conservation actions to prevent declines and extinctions.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

By the end of 2020, we will have strengthened the organisation and effectiveness of the Viper Specialist Group in order to have a more meaningful impact on the conservation of vipers globally. We will do that by supporting the individual activities of the members, increasing the membership, repositioning the VSG officers, continuing to publish the VSG newsletter, launching a new website, reactivating the presence of the VSG in social media, continuing to support Red List assessment activities, participating more in academic meetings to network with academic institutions, zoos, NGOs and other actors interested in the conservation of vipers, continuing to explore the possibilities to purchase land for the conservation of vipers, and publishing scientific and divulgative work done on vipers, among other things.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Red List: (1) complete Red List assessments for as many species of vipers in the world as possible; (2) complete assessments for European and North Asian vipers; (3) consider the assessment of *Montivipera kuhrangica* (Kuhrang Mountain Viper) for the IUCN Red List.

Research activities: (1) identify priority sites for the conservation of vipers; (2) identify Black-headed Bushmaster (*Lachesis melanocephala*) distribution in relation to human presence; (3) promote the creation of areas for the conservation of vipers in each region; (4) update the distribution maps for vipers in the Western Hemisphere; (5) obtain missing ecological information for poorly known viper species in Mesoamerica; (6) project the impact of climate change on selected species of vipers in Mesoamerica.

Plan

Planning: (1) define regional priority species for European and North Asian vipers; (2) develop a Viper Action Plan with specific actionable items; (3) complete and publish the VSG Strategic Plan; (4) complete conservation action plans for at least 50% of VSG regions.

Policy: (1) support the proposal to include the Spider-Tail Viper (*Pseudocerastes urarachnoides*) in CITES Appendices in Iran; (2) support the in-country Memorandum of Understanding regarding the harvesting of vipers in Iran.

Act

Conservation activities: define regional priority species for European and North Asian vipers.

Network

Document review: identify knowledge gaps in species assessments.

Membership: increase representativeness in membership.

Synergy: develop effective partnerships between zoos and the VSG.

Communicate

Communication: (1) create a webpage about the VSG with taxonomic updates to make this information more widely available; (2) continue to publish the Viper Specialist Group newsletter;



(3) restructure the editorial board of the newsletter; (4) create outreach materials that can be customised by region for living with vipers; (5) increase the efficiency and amount of internal and external communication; (6) implement subpages for each region in the VSG website.

Scientific meetings: (1) determine how to develop and implement focal species initiatives; (2) hold regular virtual meetings among the Regional Coordinators; (3) hold at least one in-person meeting with most of the Regional Coordinators in this quadrennium.

Activities and results 2018

Assess

Red List

i. Johannes Penner, our Red List Authority Coordinator, has been supporting Phil Bowles with all the questions and inquiries for vipers. The assessments for all species are nearly completed; we plan to have them all on the Red List by next year. (KSR #1)

ii. The members that were behind the assessment of *Montivipera kuhrangica* did not follow it through and we did not complete the evaluation. However, the species will be evaluated by next year with all the other reptiles remaining to assess. (KSR #2)

Research activities

i. A map of updated Black-headed Bushmaster distribution was generated. (KSR #12)

ii. Following the success of 2018, when the Rainforest Trust provided some funding to the Endangered Wildlife Trust for scoping a protected area for *Bitis albanica* (Albany Adder), we want to encourage something similar for other regions. We have identified several areas in Mexico that could serve for this purpose. (KSR #43)

iii. We generated new maps for viper distribution in the Western Hemisphere using the information obtained from visits to many Collections in Mesoamerica and North America, and a few in South America, and from information in Collections databases available on the internet.

iv. We are still in the process of obtaining ecological information for poorly known viper species in Mesoamerica, and plan to have the results published next year. (KSR #12)

v. We selected two species from the several that were potentially available from Mesoamerica to project the impact of climate change and have nearly obtained the results of the climate impact. We will use these species as pilots and, depending on the results, will continue with more species. (KSR #32)

Plan

Planning

i. We want to enlist the help of the membership to define regional priority species for European and North Asian vipers and generate a better action plan. (KSR #15)

ii. The Deputy Chair has made advances with the VSG Strategic Plan, and we are close to having a first draft for all the regions in the second semester of 2019. (KSR #31)

iii. The Deputy Chair has made advances to complete and publish regional VSG Strategic Plans, which will contain action plans for the regions with better and more complete information. (KSR #31)

Environmental authorities in rattlesnake conservation study area in Mexico
Photo: Ernestina Meza-Rangel



Cerrophidion tzotzilorum, a Meso American pitviper with a small distribution area
Photo: Jesús Sigala





Black-headed bushmaster,
Lachesis melanocephala, Costa Rica
Photo: Manuel Sánchez Mendoza

Network

Document review

i. Marcio Martins, the South American Regional Coordinator, published a book about snakes on islands and is preparing a publication about conservation and ecology of viperid snakes on islands. This will be taken into account for the action plan for viperid snakes.

Synergy

i. Stephen Spear moved to The Wilds, securing a way to develop more effective partnerships with zoos.

Communicate

Communication

i. We bought a domain, web hosting and web constructing software with donated funds, and created a new website for the group in the GoDaddy platform. However, we are in the midst of moving that platform to a new domain. (KSR #28)

ii. There was no agreement on continuing the publication of the newsletter, but we will publish a newsletter in 2019 and decide if we want to continue working with the publication of the bulletin. (KSR #28)

iii. The proposal to attempt to convert the newsletter into a more formal publication outlet (similar to a peer-reviewed journal), was not received well by several Regional Coordinators, because of the increase in workload; however, we agreed to discuss it further and decide once we restart the publication of our regular newsletter. (KSR #28)

iv. We have not yet produced outreach materials that can be customized by region for living with vipers, but hope to make some advances by the end of 2019. (KSR #28)

v. Increasing the efficiency and amount of internal and external communication was partially achieved, as we have not yet changed our communication channels or frequency of meetings. (KSR #28)

vi. We created subpages for each region on the new VSG website (viperspecialistgroup.org). However, we are moving that website to another place and will restructure it as it contained information that did not comply with the personal data policies of IUCN. (KSR #28)

Scientific meetings

i. We had two regular virtual meetings among the Regional Coordinators in 2018.

ii. We are considering having a face-to-face meeting with most of the Regional Coordinators in this quadrennium, either at the World Congress of Herpetology in New Zealand in 2020 or in a country suggested by any Regional Coordinator, based on availability of funds.

Acknowledgements

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Summary of activities 2018

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 4/5

Assess	7	
Plan	3	
Network	2	
Communicate	8	

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 2, 12, 15, 26, 28, 31, 32, 43

KSR: Key Species Result