



Species

ISSUE 64

2023 Report of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and Secretariat



The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC)

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a science-based network of thousands of volunteer experts from almost every country of the world, all working together toward achieving the vision of “a just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to both prevent the loss and aid recovery of the diversity of life on earth.”

Members of SSC belong to one or more of near 200 Specialist Groups, Red List Authorities, Action Partnerships, Task Forces, and Conservation Committees that make up the Network, each focusing on a taxonomic group (plants, fungi, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and invertebrates), national species, or a disciplinary issue, such as sustainable use and livelihoods, translocation of species, wildlife health, climate change, and conservation planning.

Framed by the Species Conservation Cycle, SSC’s major role is to provide information to IUCN on biodiversity conservation, the inherent value of species, their role in ecosystem health and functioning, the provision of ecosystem services, and their support to human livelihoods. This information is fed into the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

2021-2025 Species Strategic Plan

The IUCN Species Strategic Plan encompasses the joint work of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and a number of partnerships to achieve more than 2,700 targets proposed by the Network during the 2021-2025 quadrennium.

To accomplish those targets, the Species Conservation Cycle was established, which is the conceptual framework for the Network activities. The Species Conservation Cycle’s main purpose is to guide efforts for valuing and conserving biodiversity through three essential components that are linked to each other:

ASSESS: Understand and inform the world about the status and trends of biodiversity.

PLAN: Develop collaborative, inclusive and science-based conservation strategies, plans and policies.

ACT: Convene and mobilise conservation actions to improve the status of biodiversity.



Their implementation requires two transversal components:

NETWORK: Enhance and support our immediate network and alliances to achieve our biodiversity targets.

COMMUNICATE: Drive strategic and targeted communications to enhance our conservation impact.

SSC Species Report

Annual progress in the implementation of the 2021-2025 Species Strategic Plan is documented in the SSC *Species Report*, which consists of a comprehensive description and analysis of the activities and results generated by the members of the SSC Network and Centers for Species Survival (CSS) each year. Each SSC and CSS group contributes to this document by providing a yearly summarised description of their achievements, which is presented in stand-alone reports.

Structure of the IUCN SSC and CSS Stand-alone Reports

Stand-alone reports summarize the activities conducted and results generated by each group member of the SSC and CSS. Following, is the structure of the stand-alone report and the contents under each session.

Title of the group

Photograph(s) of the Chair/Co-Chairs

Group information

Includes names of Chair/Co-Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Deputy Chairs, Red List Authority Coordinators, Program Officers, Species Survival Directors, and Species Survival Officers, their institutional affiliations, number of members and social networks currently active.

Logo of the group

Mission statement

Includes the mission of the group.

Projected impact for the 2021-2025 quadrennium

Includes the description of the impact on species conservation resulting from the implementation of the targets formulated by the group for the 2021-2025 quadrennium.

Targets for the 2021-2025 quadrennium

Includes the targets planned by the SSC or CSS group for the 2021-2025 quadrennium ordered alphabetically by component of the Species Conservation Cycle. Each target is labeled with a numerical code (e.g., T-001, T-012) that identifies it in the SSC DATA database and its status for the reported year is indicated (Not initiated, On track or Achieved).

Activities and results

Includes the targets for which activities were conducted and results were generated during the reported year, ordered alphabetically, first by component of the Species Conservation Cycle, and second by Activity Category. Description of activities and results includes the indicator that best describes progress, its associated quantitative or qualitative result, and the narrative description of the activity conducted or result obtained. Each activity or result reported is linked to the Key Species Result to which it is mainly associated (e.g., KSR#1, KSR#5).

Acknowledgements

Includes the acknowledgements to funding agencies, partners, and persons who contributed to the progress of the targets of the group.

Summary of achievements

Summarises information of the group's strategic plan for the quadrennium and progress achieved implementing targets for all the components of the Species Conservation Cycle during the reported year.

Animalia

Fungi

Plantae

National Species

Disciplinary

Action Partnership

Task Force

Red List Authority

Committee

Center for Species Survival

Example for the recommended citation:

Lunn, N. and Laindre, K.L. 2024. 2023 Report of the Polar Bear Specialist Group. In: IUCN SSC and Secretariat. *2023 Report of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and Secretariat*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. 4 pp.

IUCN SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group



CO-CHAIR
Nick Lunn

Environment and
Climate Change
Canada, Edmonton,
Alberta, Canada



CO-CHAIR
Kristin L. Laidre

School of Aquatic and
Fishery Sciences, Uni-
versity of Washington,
Seattle, Washington,
US

**RED LIST AUTHORITY
COORDINATOR**

Eric V. Regehr
Polar Science
Center, University of
Washington, Seattle,
Washington, US

NUMBER OF MEMBERS

34

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE

Website: <https://www.iucn-pbsg.org>

Mission statement

The mission of the IUCN SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) is to coordinate, synthesise and distribute scientific information necessary to guide the long-term viability of Polar Bears and their habitats.

Projected impact 2021–2025

The Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) is currently classified as Vulnerable (VU) on the basis of a projected reduction in global population size due to loss of sea ice habitat. Loss of Arctic sea ice due to climate change is the most serious threat to Polar Bears throughout their circumpolar range, but action to mitigate this threat is beyond the ability of either the PBSG or the five governments that comprise the Polar Bear Range States. The continued commitment of the Polar Bear Range States to the implementation of its 2015 *Circumpolar Action Plan: Conservation Strategy for Polar Bears* is critical to help secure the long-term persistence of Polar Bears in the wild that represent the genetic, behavioural and ecological diversity of the species. The PBSG considers periodic updated assessments of the status and trends of the world's 19 recognised subpopulations, identification of areas of essential habitat for Polar Bears, and further understanding and refining of

definitions of sustainable harvest of polar Bears to be important pieces to be considered by the Polar Bear Range States. During the current quadrennium, we would expect continued actions identified under the 2015 Circumpolar Action Plan to be taken by the responsible authorities and that the PBSG continues to provide technical advice and scientific oversight where appropriate.

Targets 2021–2025

ASSESS

T-003 Assess the status/trend of all 19 currently recognised subpopulations.
Status: Achieved

T-008 Review and update the Polar Bear SG Status Table.
Status: Achieved

T-013 Plan for next Red List assessment of Polar Bears.
Status: On track

PLAN

T-006 Provide to the five governments comprising the Polar Bear Range States assessment and advice with respect to essential habitat, sustainable harvest and climate change communications as part of the Range States Circumpolar Action Plan for Polar Bears.
Status: Achieved

T-007 Undertake a technical review of a white paper on sustainable harvest written by the five Polar Bear Range States as part of their Circumpolar Action Plan.
Status: Achieved

T-010 Mapping existing protected areas in relation to PBSG's commonly used habitat as part of the Range States Circumpolar Action Plan.
Status: On track

NETWORK

T-002 Review, renew and recruit up to 33 members, as per the PBSG Terms of Reference, for the 2021–2025 Quadrennium.
Status: Achieved

COMMUNICATE

T-001 Hold the 19th Working Meeting of the Polar Bear Specialist Group (virtual).
Status: Achieved

T-004 Establish, develop, renew and migrate information to a new Polar Bear Specialist Group website.
Status: Achieved

T-009 Provide an update on PBSG activities to the Polar Bear Range States.
Status: Achieved

T-011 Expression of conservation concerns related to harvest management in Nunavut, Canada.
Status: Achieved



Mother and cub Polar Bears (*Ursus maritimus*) on sea ice western Hudson Bay
Photo: D. McGeachy

T-012 Plan for the 20th working meeting of the PBSG.
Status: On track

Activities and results 2023

ASSESS

Communication

T-008 Review and update the Polar Bear SG Status Table. (KSR 5)

Number of reports on Polar Bear SG Status Table review and update: 1

Result description: In October 2023, PBSG released its latest status report on the world's Polar Bear subpopulations. The report included estimated subpopulation sizes and associated uncertainty in those estimates, subpopulation trends, changes in sea-ice habitat, recent human-caused mortality, and summaries of subpopulation-specific concerns and vulnerabilities. The full report is available for download from the [PBSG's website](#).

COMMUNICATE

Communication

T-004 Establish, develop, renew, and migrate information to a new Polar Bear Specialist Group website. (KSR 12)

Number of websites developed: 1

Result description: The PBSG website was completed and launched in December 2023.

T-009 Provide an update on PBSG activities to the Polar Bear Range States. (KSR 12)

Number of presentations delivered in scientific events: 1

Result description: The five Polar Bear range states met in a virtual format, October 29–November 2, 2023, in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. As the Scientific Advisor to the Range States, the PBSG provided updates on its activities including the updated subpopulation status assessment and a habitat mapping project that was completed as part of Objective 3 of the Circumpolar Action Plan – Conservation Strategy for the Polar Bear. The PBSG raised its concerns that aspects of Polar Bear management in Canada were inconsistent with the 1973 Agreement and stressed the need for clearly stated subpopulation-specific management objectives, especially where harvest occurs, to develop management strategies meeting stated objectives, to provide context to trends in status, and, to facilitate adaptive decision-making and state-dependent assessments.

T-011 Expression of conservation concerns related to harvest management in Nunavut, Canada. (KSR 12)

Number of expression of conservation concern letters sent: 1

Result description: At the virtual meeting of the five Polar Bear Range States (October 29–November 2, 2023), the PBSG raised its concerns that aspects of Polar Bear harvest management in Nunavut, Canada were inconsistent with the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears and stressed the need for clearly

stated subpopulation-specific management objectives, especially where harvest occurs, to develop management strategies to meet stated objectives, to provide context to trends in status, and to facilitate adaptive decision-making and state-dependent assessments. In December 2023, the PBSG sent a letter to the Heads of Delegation of the Polar Bear Range States to reinforce the concerns expressed in its public presentation. The Range States acknowledged receipt of the letter and advised the PBSG that a response would be forthcoming.

Acknowledgements

We thank Polar Bears International for providing funding to establish and renew the Polar Bear Specialist Group website. We would also like to acknowledge the governments, agencies, and organisations for their ongoing support of their employees' participation in the PBSG.

Summary of achievements

Total number of targets 2021–2025: 12

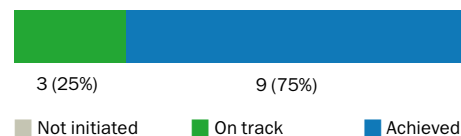
Geographic regions: 11 Global, 1 America

Actions during 2023:

Assess: 1 (KSR 5)

Communicate: 3 (KSR 12)

Overall achievement 2021–2025:





Nothobranchius fuscotaeniatus
Photo: Csenge Nagy



Tetra Parnaiba
Photo: Karina Molina



Trioceros hoehnelii
Photo: Christopher V. Anderson



Sternberia lutea
Photo: Hayri Duman



Egretta rufescens
Photo: Ernesto Gómez



Lactifluus neotropicus
Photo: Aida Vasco



Mayfly nymph (*Ecdyonurus* sp.)
Photo: Astrid Schmidt-Kloiber and Wolfram Graf