IUCN SSC Species Survival Commission

Species

ISSUE 64

2023 Report of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and Secretariat

Stand-alone report
IUCN SSC Crane Specialist Group

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 standalone 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 Authory 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:
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2023 Report

IUCN SSC Crane Specialist Group

CHAIR
Kerryn Morrison
International Crane Foundation/ Endangered Wildlife Trust, Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

RED LIST AUTHORITY COORDINATOR
BirdLife International

NUMBER OF MEMBERS
65

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE
Website: https://savingcranes.org/crane-specialist-group

Mission statement

The mission of the IUCN SSC Crane Specialist Group is to promote the study of cranes and their threats, develop and disseminate solutions to those threats, and enhance the conservation of cranes and their habitats worldwide.

Projected impact 2021–2025

Secure all 15 of the world's cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds, and flyways on which they depend. Reduce or halt the decline of the 10 threatened species and maintain stable to growing populations of the other five.

Targets 2021–2025

ASSESS

T-003 Estimate the impact of poisoning on threatened crane species and advocate for reduced poisoning at hot spots by 2025.
Status: On track

T-010 Understand the status, distribution, and threats to Black Crowned Cranes (*Balearica pavonina*) across their range by 2023.
Status: On track

T-011 Update and complete Red List and Green Status assessments for at least two crane species by 2023.
Status: On track

PLAN

T-006 Develop and implement integrated flyway level Conservation Action Plans for Siberian Crane (*Leucogeranus leucogeranus*), Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*), White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*), Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*) and Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*) by 2025.
Status: On track

T-007 Develop a user-friendly resource for *Cranes and Agriculture: A Global Guide for Sharing the Landscape* by 2022.
Status: Achieved

T-012 Develop at least two National Action Plans for cranes in Africa by 2025.
Status: On track

T-015 Review and revise the Crane Conservation Strategy in 2024 for the period 2025–2030.
Status: Not initiated

ACT

T-001 Implement the Single Species Action Plan for Grey Crowned Cranes (*Balearica regulorum*) by 2025.
Status: On track

T-002 Implement the Conservation Plan for the Eastern Population of the Siberian Crane by 2025.
Status: On track

T-004 Identify and mitigate factors contributing to the decline of the western populations of Red-crowned and White-naped cranes by 2025.
Status: On track

T-008 Secure or upgrade the level of legal protection for three or more crane sites by 2025.
Status: Achieved

T-014 Implement the Crane Conservation Strategy published in 2019.
Status: On track

NETWORK

T-005 Complete four field training courses by 2025.
Status: On track

T-009 Form the Middle East Crane Working Group and develop strategies for reducing threats including hunting by 2022.
Status: On track

T-013 Establish working groups within the Crane Specialist Group to increase the collaboration between members around hunting, poisoning, powerline collisions, wildlife health and research by 2021.
Status: On track

T-017 Establish a formal partnership that will provide financial support to the Specialist Group by 2025.
Status: Not initiated

Rice fields protected to help cranes during natural food shortage at Poyang Lake
Photo: Jin Jiefeng

COMMUNICATE

T-016 Distribute a newsletter to the Crane Specialist Group membership every second year, updating the membership on the progress made towards achieving the Crane Conservation Strategy.
Status: No longer a priority

Activities and results 2023

ASSESS

Research activities

T-003 Estimate the impact of poisoning on threatened crane species and advocate for reduced poisoning at hot spots by 2025. (KSR 5)

Number of research projects completed or supported by SSC members per taxonomic group and region: 0

Result description: The Crane Working Group of Eurasia conference held in Stavropol (October 2023) focused on reasons for Demoiselle Crane's decline as well as the mass mortality last winter of Eurasian Cranes because of poisoning. Therefore, they organised a Round Table on 'Threats for Demoiselle and Eurasian Cranes'. Representatives were invited from the North Caucasus Branches of the Federal Service for Supervision of Natural Resources, and the Federal Service for Supervision of Agriculture, the ministries of Natural Resources of the Republic of Kalmykia and Stavropol Territory, the Regional Veterinarian service, the regional prosecutor's office, and local government. The ICF/EWT Partnership is gathering information on crane poisoning incidents across Africa – especially in Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda. Most of these poisonings are a result of human-wildlife conflict related to crop damage. As a result, a number of research projects are currently underway to better understand the damage cranes cause to crops and to test mitigation measures that are relevant in a small-scale agricultural setting.

T-010 Understand the status, distribution, and threats to Black Crowned Cranes (*B. pavonina*) across their range by 2023. (KSR 5)

Number of research projects completed or supported by SSC members per taxonomic group and region: 3

Result description: The ICF/EWT Partnership has developed a good understanding of the current distribution and relative population size of Black Crowned Cranes across the Sahel of Africa. Their range has reduced by more than 70% over the past 20 years and the species is now extinct or close to extinction in several countries across their former range. Good concentrations are still present during the non-breeding seasons in Chad, South Sudan and Ethiopia, but their breeding range and actual population size needs still to be determined. Research and conservation action has continued in Senegal and Ethiopia. Sira Doumbia completed her PhD on Black Crowned Cranes in Senegal, and Abebayehu Aticho continued with his PhD which includes Black Crowned Cranes in southwestern Ethiopia. In addition, the ICF/EWT Partnership, in partnership with Afriwet Consultants Etude and Conseils and Association Nature Koussabel, has continued monitoring efforts for Black Crowned Cranes in the Casamance and Djoudj National Park in Senegal.

T-011 Update and complete Red List and Green Status assessments for at least two crane species by 2023. (KSR 6)

Number of species that have been assessed through the different tools: 0

Result description: Assessments are being conducted, and will be completed by April 2024 for the Hooded Crane, Eurasian Crane, Sarus Crane, Brolga, Black Crowned Crane, and Grey Crowned Crane.

PLAN

Planning

T-006 Develop and implement integrated flyway level Conservation Action Plans for Siberian Crane (*L. leucogeranus*), Red-crowned Crane (*G. japonensis*), White-naped Crane (*G. vipio*), Hooded Crane (*G. monacha*) and Black-necked Crane (*G. nigricollis*) by 2025. (KSR 8)

Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 0

Result description: A Flyway-level Strategic Action Plan for Black-necked Crane was reviewed at a workshop in November 2022 and completed in 2023. The International Crane Foundation is currently preparing a funding proposal to support its implementation. A Blueprint for the Conservation of Siberian Cranes in China is planned for the end of 2024.

Policy

T-007 Develop a user-friendly resource for Cranes and Agriculture: A Global Guide for Sharing the Landscape by 2022. (KSR 9)

Number of documents provided to support/guide policy-making: 0

Result description: A user-friendly resource for the document 'Cranes and Agriculture: A Global Guide for Sharing the Landscape' has been completed, and was published online in July 2023, with thousands of views through social media. It has also been translated into Chinese and was distributed in December 2023 at the ICF 50th Anniversary Reception in Beijing.

T-012 Develop at least two National Action Plans for cranes in Africa by 2025. (KSR 9)

Number of policies where SSC members provided technical input: 0

Result description: The Kenya National Single Species Action Plan for Grey Crowned Cranes is currently being reviewed by national stakeholders through a series of validation workshops in all key crane areas in Kenya. The final step will be approval by the line ministry. Separate South African Wattled Crane and Blue Crane Conservation Action Plans are currently under development, a process that is being led by the ICF/EWT Partnership and facilitated by the IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group.

ACT

Conservation actions

T-001 Implement the Single Species Action Plan for Grey Crowned Cranes (*B. regulorum*) by 2025. (KSR 10)

Number of actions addressing major drivers/emerging threats of species or population loss: 0

Result description: The African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement's International Single Species Action Plan for Grey Crowned Cranes is being implemented. Annual reports are provided for progress towards this plan. These reports include updates from both species' experts and government focal points from each of the countries where Grey Crowned Cranes are found.

T-002 Implement the Conservation Plan for the Eastern Population of the Siberian Crane by 2025. (KSR 10)

Number of actions addressing major drivers/emerging threats of species or population loss: 0

Result description: The Disney Saving Species Program has supported diverse conservation actions in Russia and China for this population's breeding, staging and wintering grounds. Breeding success was monitored in Kytalyk National Park, and climate change influences were reported. At the wintering area in Poyang Lake Basin, significant efforts were made to strengthen environmental education (now three crane schools established), community engagement (a new community education centre in the Chaqizhou rice farming area), applied research (on feeding behaviour, diet, Vallisneria restoration, crayfish population status), and sister site agreements were signed with Kytalyk NP in Yakutia and Khurkh-Khuiten NR (KKNR) in Mongolia. In the staging areas, monitoring and applied research continued, as well as networking of sites.

T-004 Identify and mitigate factors contributing to the decline of the western populations of Red-crowned and White-naped Cranes by 2025. (KSR 10)

Number of actions addressing major drivers/emerging threats of species or population loss: 0

Result description: For the Red-Crowned Crane, a land-use study was completed in the Hulunbeier region in 2023 to inform changes in breeding habitat status and conservation strategy development. For the White-naped Crane – coordinated monitoring of migration and studies of staging and breeding areas in Inner Mongolia – were conducted in 2023 to determine prevalent threats and appropriate conservation strategies. In Mongolia, factors impacting breeding success such as livestock grazing, and the presence of dogs were monitored at Khurkh-Khuiten NR in Mongolia (KKNR) and awareness was raised among local residents.

Artificial wheat feeding for *Grus grus* with a fertilizer spreader on grassland NE Germany
Photo: Gunter Nowald

T-008 Secure or upgrade the level of legal protection for three or more crane sites by 2025. (KSR 10)

Number of areas under management for the species or group of species: 3

Result description: The management of the KKNR in Mongolia was secured following a co-management agreement in 2022, and its boundaries extended to encompass 205,000 ha. A 20-year co-management agreement between the Government of Zambia, International Crane Foundation, and WWF Zambia for the Blue Lagoon and Lochinvar National Parks and their associated Game Management Area on the Kafue Flats in Zambia was signed. This is currently the most important wetland in Africa for Wattled Cranes and holds a good population of Grey Crowned Cranes as well. A total of 135,000 ha of privately owned grassland and wetland habitat has been secured by the ICF/EWT Partnership under the Biodiversity Stewardship Programme in South Africa. This is a process whereby landowners voluntarily enter their properties into the Protected Area network of the country. This area is important for Blue, Grey Crowned, and Wattled Cranes.

T-014 Implement the Crane Conservation Strategy published in 2019. (KSR 10)

Number of intervention letters addressing major drivers/emerging threats of species or population loss: 2

Result description: Most of the actions outlined in the Crane Conservation Strategy are being implemented. In 2023 the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) continued assisting the national South African power utility, Eskom, with wildlife management services including the investigation of bird collisions with infrastructure and the relevant recommendations for mitigation. In the 2023 calendar year, a further 80 power line spans were marked with diurnal bird flight diverters in the Blue Crane habitat (Western Cape, Eastern Cape), and five terminating structures were insulated to reduce the electrocution risk to perching species such as the Grey Crowned Crane. During all mitigation product installation, the utility will cut a Basic Insulation Level (BIL) gap in the earth strap, if present, to ensure that metal components at the top of the structure will not be earthed and pose a threat to perching birds. This is done in accordance with the infrastructure maintenance instruction at Eskom, developed in partnership with the EWT. Through a contract with Eskom Research, Testing & Development, the EWT also expanded the long-term line marking experiment in central South Africa, adding four additional bird flight diverter designs to determine the effectiveness of these in reducing large bird collisions, as well as field testing the durability of the devices. In 2023, the International Crane Foundation (ICF) conducted and completed multiple research projects on pollutant exposure in whooping cranes of North America (Threat 11.1.2). One research collaboration with Environment and Climate Change Canada will be ongoing and is intended to take a broader ecosystem health approach to assessing the remnant wild Central Flyway population. Initial results of these projects were shared at the 16th North American Crane Workshop, and publication of them is expected in 2024-25. Since 2021, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has become a significant disease threat to cranes, mostly, but not exclusively, limited to areas of high population density such as artificial feeding sites, i.e. Israel, Japan, among others (Threat 16). Outreach and guidance have been forwarded to partners from ICF, primarily consisting of the Avian Influenza and Wildlife risk management guidelines promulgated by the OIE and IUCN SSC Wildlife Health Specialist Group. The nascent wildlife health working group of the Crane SG will be revisiting additional needs for guidance on HPAI outbreak management in cranes in 2024. In the Republic of Korea, a local campaign was launched in 2023 to raise awareness of powerline collision mortality in White-naped and Red-crowned Cranes in the CCZ area. The campaign secured local government support and in cooperation with the power company two stretches of wires were marked, and more planned in 2024. The ICF provided emergency funding to Izumi City and the Red-Crowned Crane Conservancy (RCCC; Hokkaido) to respond to HPAI outbreaks in November 2022 and further funding to the RCCC in 2023.

NETWORK

Capacity building

T-005 Complete four field training courses by 2025. (KSR 2)

Number of people trained in conservation action: 1

Result description: The ICF/EWT Partnership held a workshop in Kenya in July 2023 for members of their Africa team and partner organisations from across Africa. This included a number of sessions aimed at improving capacity in

implementing and understanding conservation strategies applicable to crane conservation in human-dominated landscapes. It was also an opportunity to build relationships and encourage collaboration across projects in Africa.

Synergy

T-009 Form the Middle East Crane Working Group and develop strategies for reducing threats including hunting by 2022. (KSR 1)

Number of in-kind partnerships established and maintained: 2

Result description: The Middle East Crane Conservation Group was established in 2023 and the first issue of its newsletter was published, highlighting serious hunting threats in the region. The International Crane Foundation (ICF) is supporting an assessment of hunting threats in Pakistan in 2024 and collaborating with the National Wildlife Centre in Saudi Arabia to counter excessive hunting in that country. The Partnership for Oklahoma Wetland Restoration (POWeR) was formed in 2023 including multiple NGOs – ICF, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Playa Lakes Joint Venture – and a state agency – Oklahoma Conservation Commission – to protect, enhance, and restore palustrine wetland habitat within the WHCR migration corridor in the US state of Oklahoma.

T-013 Establish working groups within the Crane Specialist Group to increase the collaboration between members around hunting, poisoning, powerline collisions, wildlife health and research by 2021. (KSR 1)

Number of in-kind partnerships established and maintained: 4

Result description: The Cranes and Energy working group has been established, with one formal meeting held following the initial introductory meeting. Participants from North America and Africa, from a variety of specialist backgrounds, have volunteered their time to build a set of achievable objectives for the working group. The working group agenda has been developed and will guide the group members to achieve the newly set objectives: (1) Developing practical guidance for the proper siting of alternative, e.g., wind, and traditional, e.g., oil pipelines, energy infrastructure near important habitats for crane species. For example, defensible buffer distances around important roosting wetlands to preserve foraging habitat from energy development. (2) Improve our capacities to identify, access, and deploy the best possible mitigation approaches in different contexts when infrastructure is not well-sited. For example, work to develop guidance that balances costs with collision risk for threatened species. (3) Discuss and work toward improving collaborative approaches with industry and governmental partners at various scales cross-nationally on energy issues. What cooperative structures work and which do not? How can we make them more effective? (4) Publish/produce guidance on important issues to direct action. For example, should we produce white papers on key issues? Should we work toward a 'Cranes and Energy' book similar to the 'Cranes and Agriculture' publication completed a handful of years ago? The group agreed to quarterly meetings where progress on objectives will be reviewed and updates from participants will be noted. The Research Working Group was established, and an initial meeting of interested Crane Specialist Members was held. The team is currently gathering papers on key research and monitoring elements related to cranes, including band and ring

Africa crane team workshop in Kenya in 2023
Photo: Pieter Botha

information, capture techniques, the use of drones for monitoring, among others. They will use this platform as an opportunity to develop best practice guidelines for anyone monitoring cranes and their movements. The Crane Health team was established. They have been involved with gathering and synthesising information on Avian Influenza and assisted with research projects related to lead poisoning, and trying to determine the reason behind leg deformities seen in Blue Cranes in South Africa. The Hunting Working Group was established, and under the auspices of the Middle East Crane Working Group, they have been working to understand better the hunting pressures on Demoiselle Cranes across their range and to develop a project to address this threat to the species.

COMMUNICATE

Communication

T-016 Distribute a newsletter to the Crane Specialist Group membership every second year, updating the membership on the progress made towards achieving the Crane Conservation Strategy. (KSR 12)

Number of Species e-bulletin, Save Our Species newsletter, SSC Groups' newsletter editions produced: 0

Result description: No newsletter has been distributed to the members of the Crane Specialist Group. However, a number of the world's Crane Working Groups, as well as the International Crane Foundation, regularly distribute information and newsletters that are available widely. In addition, the new SSC platform provides the opportunity for more regular updates to be sent to members. For this reason, an IUCN Crane Specialist Group newsletter will not be developed.

Acknowledgements

We thank the International Crane Foundation for hosting the IUCN Crane Specialist Group, and the International Crane Foundation/Endangered Wildlife Trust Partnership for supporting Kerryn Morrison's involvement as the Chair. Thank you to the European Crane Working Group, North American Crane Working Group, Crane Working Group of Eurasia, International Red-crowned Crane Network, Black-necked Crane Network, Middle East Crane Working Group, and East Asian Crane Network, for leading species or geographic subgroups for cranes.

Summary of achievements

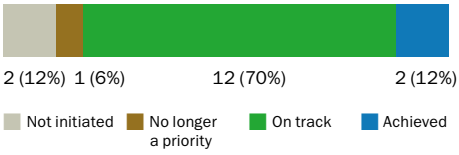
Total number of targets 2021–2025: 17

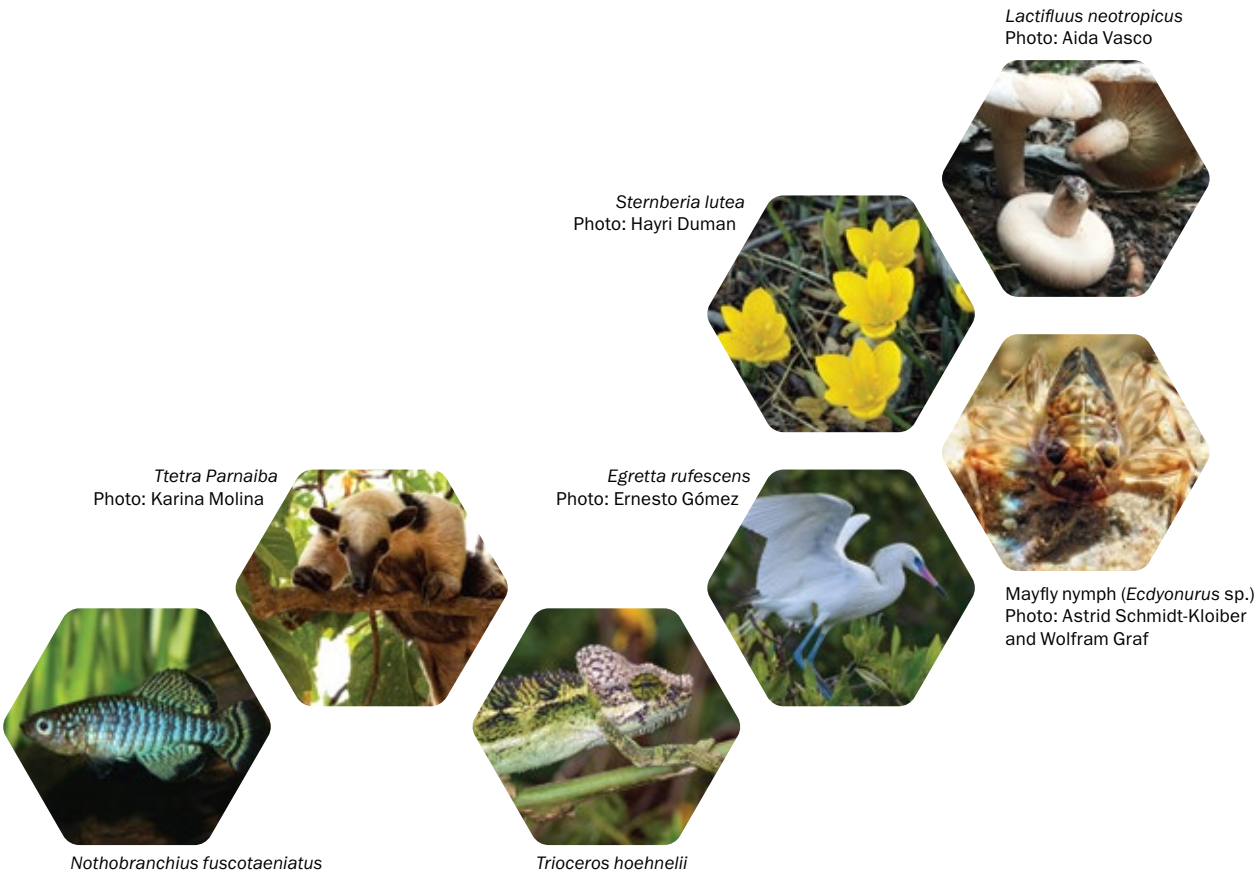
Geographic regions: 11 Global, 3 Africa, 3 Asia

Actions during 2023:

Assess: 3 (KSR 5, 6)
Plan: 3 (KSR 8, 9)
Act: 5 (KSR 10)
Network: 3 (KSR 1, 2)
Communicate: 1 (KSR 12)

Overall achievement 2021–2025:





Lactifluus neotropicus
Photo: Aida Vasco

Sternberia lutea
Photo: Hayri Duman

Ttetra Parnaiba
Photo: Karina Molina

Egretta rufescens
Photo: Ernesto Gómez

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

Nothobranchius fuscotaeniatus
Photo: Csenge Nagy

Trioceros hoehnelii
Photo: Christopher V. Anderson