



**What is a Species Survival Commission
NATIONAL SPECIES SPECIALIST GROUP**

About this guide

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) aims to expand its efforts through regional and national approaches in order to collaborate in making the best decisions to achieve biodiversity conservation based on the best scientific knowledge available.

This guide provides an introductory overview about the National Species Specialist Group.

What is a Species Survival Commission National Species Specialist Group

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Strengthening national capacity

The Species Survival Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN SSC) is a science-based network of thousands of volunteer experts from almost every country in 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."**



Camouflage Grouper (*Epinephelus polyphekadion*)
Photo © Yvonne Sadovy

The SSC has largely focused its efforts on small groups of specialists organized by taxa. Initially, they were fundamentally scientists, but in ever-growing numbers, practitioners, social science professionals, and community members are incorporated. In the search for greater effectiveness, the need to focus not only on taxa but also on specific geographic regions and countries has become clear over time. Since countries or their governments are the ones that assume major international commitments regarding conservation, the need for the SSC to focus its efforts at the national level is becoming progressively evident. This also requires the incorporation of an increasing number of members, not only scientists but also professionals who represent a greater diversity of other disciplines and interest groups.

Traditionally, one of the fundamental contributions of the SSC has been through the Red List, which has significantly contributed to setting priorities in the conservation effort. Conservation planning and the determination of Key Biodiversity Areas have been other great contributions of the SSC. All of these efforts are framed in the SSC's grand vision that its activities be encompassed in the **Species Conservation Cycle: assess-plan-act**. This vision is also part of our effort at the national level, therefore the SSC wants to direct its efforts to create groups of specialists at the national scales that fully incorporate the SSC Conservation Cycle as the core of their workplans.



What is the purpose of a National Species Specialist Group (NSSG)?

This new type of Group aims to bring together efforts at the national level to collaborate in making the best decisions to achieve biodiversity conservation based on the best scientific knowledge available. Its main purpose is not to work with any particular biological group but to help or contribute with other SSC Groups to generate products appropriate to the reality of each country. These Groups are called upon to focus their activities on species that have not been covered by conservation plans and do not receive priority at the national level.

What does a NSSG do?



Viviparous Foxtail Cactus
Photo © Steve Jones

Each NSSG must adjust its activities according to the priorities that each country has, always within the set of activities that conceptually fit within the Species Conservation Cycle. However, we can outline some examples of what NSSGs can do in each of the components of the cycle. For example:

- Determine which taxonomic groups should be assessed as a priority from the point of view of extinction risk.
- Publish and make available the red lists of species.
- Carry out projects to assess the country's endemic species or collect the basic information necessary to address conservation planning.
- Support the development of single and multi-species conservation plans, based on information available in the Red List and other sources, and using established IUCN tools for planning.
- Support the mainstreaming and integration of spatial planning outputs into development sector planning and national strategies and action plans e.g. National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Additionally, they could support or augment efforts by the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) National Coordination Group (if there is one in the country), existing NGOs and others to promote and support the establishment of new or expanded Protected Areas or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

What kind of members do NSSGs have?

Members of NSSGs are volunteers who may be based at scientific, academic or research institutions, non-government organizations, indigenous peoples and community organizations, governmental agencies, or independent professionals. Membership should be a good representation of experts who work across a wide range of taxonomic groups but also who have excellent bioregional knowledge of ecological features, as well as, about the impact of pressures. Members with a particular transdisciplinary focus, e.g., sustainable use, human-wildlife conflict, invasive species, or climate change, are encouraged to be part of the Group.

Chair of National Species Specialist Group

The initial Chair of the NSSGs should be the main person who has done the work of structuring the group conceptually and in terms of its potential membership. Then, the Group itself, according to its dynamics, and after being consolidated, logically should seek a new leadership, if required. The Chair's role is to coordinate and promote the Group's activities, supervise them, report on them, and maintain the functioning of the Group within the standards required by the IUCN. The Chair can speak on behalf of the Group, and by default, the NSSG president will represent the SSC at the corresponding IUCN National Committee. Usually, the Groups have two Co-Chairs. Considering the responsibility and scope of the work involved in the NSSG, shared leadership is encouraged, so the figure of co-chairs would be the initial structure to shape this group.



Neotropical Otter (*Lontra longicaudis*)
Photo © Nicole Duplaix

How to align with other efforts?

NSSG is part of the IUCN family, and therefore it is expected that it has close ties with other Commission's Groups. One of the most obvious links should be with other SSC Groups, keeping in mind that the focus of the NSSG is impact at the national level. However, it is known that not all global biodiversity is covered by SSC Groups, but in those cases in which a NSSG project has to do with the object of study of another existing SSC Group, it is expected that there will be an intimate collaboration between them. Likewise, the NSSG is expected to build an entire network of relationships with all national institutions, public or private, that are related to the objectives and work plan of the NSSG. A very close cooperative relationship with the IUCN national committee as well as the national biodiversity authority is expected. The NSSG should contribute significantly to the corresponding National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP).

Partnerships

An NSSG benefits from having institutional partners, specifically a host institution, who can provide a framework for the Group's work.

For example, one way is by giving the Group the possibility of managing funds for projects. Another is to facilitate the institutional platform of the host or partner institution for the participation of key members of the Group, for example the dedication of a significant amount of time of the Chair or a Program Officer. An institutional partner or host institution could well be a public or government entity that is dedicated to biodiversity policy or research. It could also be an academic institution, an NGO, a zoo or aquarium, or any organization linked to biodiversity conservation. Certainly, this relationship must be mutually beneficial, and the institutional partner will see in its relationship with the NSSG a way to project its own mission or to collaborate significantly with the achievement of a national objective.



Photo © Kira Mileham

How to finance its activities?

National Species Specialist Group do not have independent legal status, and consequently are unable to enter into formal legal arrangements with another entity.

Instead, the Groups are composed of experts and practitioners who volunteer their time to represent and work on behalf of the SSC. To facilitate managing funds for the work of the National Species Specialist Group it is strongly recommended to identify a host institution. This institution will be expected to remain independent and not unduly influence the work of the NSSG. The NSSG could and should find its sources of funding, and very limited financial support may be obtained from SSC grants programs.

How to create a National Species Specialist Group?

► Terms of Reference 2021-2025

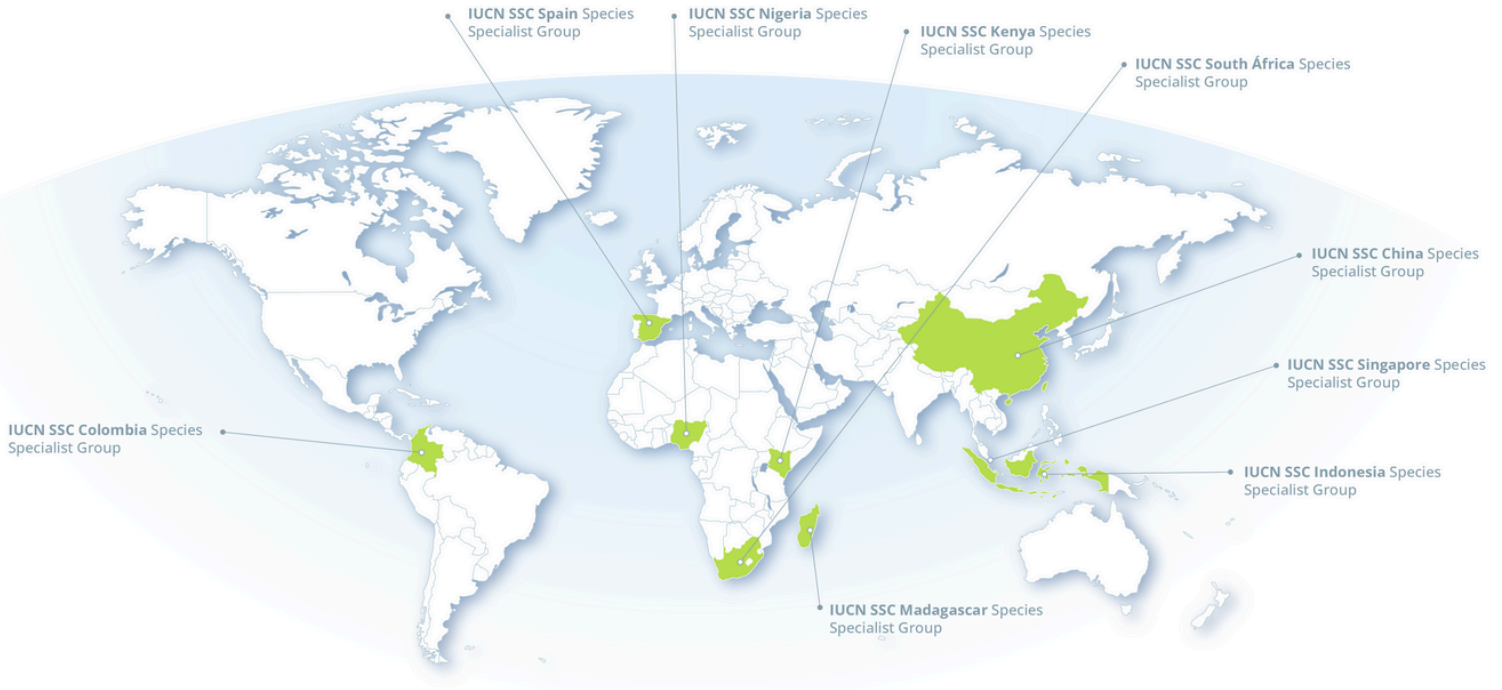
If you think it is feasible to propose a NSSG in your country please contact the SSC Chair, ssc@iucn.org who will be happy to address your request.

The creation of an NSSG depends on having an excellent written proposal prepared by a leader or group of leaders from the corresponding country, which is well-supported and feasible to be undertaken. The proposal is considered by the SSC Steering Committee and the SSC Chair who finally approves its creation. The proposal must be adapted to a simple **format** that establishes the key strategic aspects. However, the most important thing is to have a leadership committed to establishing the group and driving it until it reaches maturity and stability. This also means having a founding membership that is capable of developing a realistic work plan and showing significant results in a relatively short time. It is also important to have the support of a host or partner institution that can provide operational logistical support to the Group. Finally, it is key to have the support of the institutional members of IUCN based in the country, as well as good communication with the official government agencies responsible for biodiversity conservation. All this has to be reflected in the written proposal that the Chair of the SSC and its Steering Committee will consider. See also the **terms of reference** for NSSGs.

Benefits of having a National Species Specialist Group?

The advantage of an NSSG is having a group of national experts under the guidance of the SSC who can promote greater effectiveness in biodiversity conservation in their own country. Usually, SSC Groups are oriented toward biological groups from a global perspective, but bringing together a significant number of specialists from a specific country from all biological groups will undoubtedly contribute to a better assessment of the status of biodiversity, better planning, and better-coordinated action towards its conservation. The impact of such a group will be much more specific for that country than that of isolated thematic or taxonomic groups having a global focus.

National Species Specialist Groups



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Existing National Species Specialist Groups

To date the SSC has created the following NSSG: Colombia, China, Madagascar, Indonesia, Singapore, Kenya, Spain, Nigeria and South Africa.

Our goal is that every country may have its own NSSG.



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