



Species

ISSUE 65

2024-2025 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 trans-versal 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 that were generated during 2024 (full year) and 2025 (first quarter), 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. (2025). 2024-2025 Report of the Polar Bear Specialist Group. In: IUCN SSC and Secretariat. *Species: Annual Report of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and Secretariat 2024-2025*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. 6 pp.

IUCN SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group



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NUMBER OF MEMBERS

33

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITES

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 20 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: Achieved

T-014 Assess the status/trend of all 20 currently recognised subpopulations.
Status: Achieved

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

T-012 Plan for the 20th working meeting of the PBSG.

Status: Achieved

Activities and results 2024-2025

ASSESS

Red List

T-013 Plan for next Red List assessment of Polar Bears. (KSR 7)

Number of Red List assessment updated: 1

Result description: The next update of the Red List Assessment for Polar Bear was discussed at the June 2024 meeting of the PBSG. Work towards completion is in initial stages. A working group has been formed and has met to discuss analytical approaches and strategies.

T-014 Assess the status/trend of all 20 currently recognised subpopulations. (KSR 7)

Number of subpopulations assessed for status/trend: 20

Result description: New scientific information showed that a group of Polar Bears in southeast Greenland is the most isolated and genetically distinct in the world and spend much of the year on freshwater ice in fjords. This group of Polar Bears was recognised by the Government of Greenland in 2023 as a new subpopulation and subsequently protected. The PBSG reviewed this scientific information and at its 20th Working Meeting in June 2024 also formally recognised Southeast Greenland as a new subpopulation. The PBSG Status Table and Status Narratives were subsequently updated, which included four other subpopulations where new information was available. Of the now 20 Polar Bear subpopulations, 10 are Data Deficient, 3 are likely decreasing, 5 are likely stable, and 2 are likely increasing. Currently, Polar Bears are listed as Vulnerable under the IUCN Red List; the PBSG noted that it will review this status in 2025.

PLAN

Planning

T-010 Mapping existing protected areas in relation to PBSG's commonly used habitat as part of the Range States Circumpolar Action Plan. (KSR 8)

Number of technical documents to support the development of conservation plans/strategies: 0

Result description: In February 2024, the PBSG notified the Polar Bear Range States that it had considered their request and was willing to work on Objective 3 of the Circumpolar Action Plan, during the 2023-25 Implementation Period, pertaining to the mapping of existing protected areas in relation to commonly used habitat. Work will begin once formal confirmation to proceed and funding details have been received from the Polar Bear Range States Heads of Delegation.

COMMUNICATE

Scientific meetings

T-012 Plan for the 20th working meeting of the PBSG. (KSR 12)

Number of scientific events organized: 1

Result description: The 20th working meeting of the IUCN/SSC Polar Bear Specialist Group (PBSG) was held at the School of Aquatic and Fisheries Science, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, US, on June 10-14, 2024. The PBSG met to review and discuss current science informing the status of the world's Polar Bear subpopulations. The PBSG noted that Polar Bears are an important subsistence



Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*) ecology studies - immobilized mother and twin cubs
Photo: J. Aars



Taking blood sample for health assessment
Photo: J. Aars

resource for Indigenous people and expressed concerns about a change in harvest management in Nunavut, Canada, which affects roughly two-thirds of the global population. The harvest management system was changed to allow for an up to 50% increase in female harvest via a change in the allowable sex ratio of the harvest from two males for every female to an up to 1:1 male-female ratio. Females are critical to population growth and a higher female harvest may cause the harvest to be biologically unsustainable resulting in subpopulation declines. In addition to the PBSG identifying this practice as potentially unsustainable, it noted that this may also affect other jurisdictions that share subpopulations with Nunavut. These changes could contribute to Polar Bears meeting biological and trade criteria under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species that would qualify the species to be moved from Appendix II to Appendix I. This would prohibit the legal trade in Polar Bear products and could have negative socio-economic impacts on communities that harvest Polar Bears. Research conducted over the past four years and reviewed by the PBSG continued to show that the loss of sea ice, which is the primary habitat of Polar Bears, remains the primary threat to the persistence of Polar Bears. Sea ice loss directly affects Polar Bear access to their seal prey and results in increased land use and associated human-bear conflicts across the Arctic as food-stressed bears seek foods closer to communities, camps, and in dumps. Although current information available on Polar Bears is among the most comprehensive to date, the PBSG recognized that in some jurisdictions scientific



Polar Bears (*Ursus maritimus*) swimming
Photo: Ø. Wiig

tools such as capture and satellite telemetry are no longer being used. The PBSG noted that, as the Arctic warms, a variety of scientific methods will be required to collect the information necessary for the long-term conservation of Polar Bears, which is needed to inform management decisions and to support cultural and subsistence use by indigenous communities. In particular, identifying subpopulation boundaries and movement of bears between subpopulations, both on and off land, are critical to subpopulation assessments and mitigating bear-human conflict. This requires Polar Bear location data that can only be obtained by capture and deployment of tracking devices.

Acknowledgements

We thank the University of Washington for hosting the 20th Working Meeting of the Polar Bear Specialist Group. We are grateful to Jack Beardsley for his continued support as webmaster of the PBSG's website. We would also like to acknowledge the governments, agencies, and organisations for their ongoing support of their employees' participation on the PBSG.

Summary of achievements

Total number of targets 2021–2025: 13

Geographic regions: 12 Global, 1 America

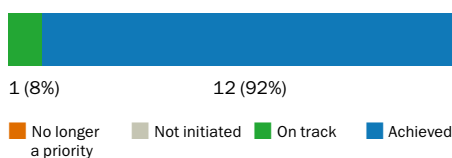
Actions during 2024-2025:

Assess: 2 (KSR 7)

Plan: 1 (KSR 8)

Communicate: 1 (KSR 12)

Overall achievement 2021–2025:



Suweon Treefrog
(*Dryophytes suweonensis*)
Photo: Amael Borzee



Marsh Cinquefoil
(*Comarum palustre*)
Photo: Magnus Goransson



Phallus aureolatus
Photo: Juliano Baltazar



Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*)
Photo: Andre Botha



Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*)
Photo: Save The Rhino Trust Namibia



Azores Nursery Spider
(*Pisaura acoreesins*)
Photo: Paulo A.V. Borges



Black and White Snapper
(*Macolor niger*)
Photo: David B. Snyder