

For more information or to set up interviews, please contact:

Maggie Roth, IUCN Media Relations, m +1 202 262 5313, e maggie.roth@iucn.org

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 GMT, 23 FEBRUARY, 2012

Twelve percent of marine species in tropical eastern Pacific threatened

Gland, Switzerland, 23 February, 2012 (IUCN) —Twelve percent of marine species surveyed in the Gulf of California, the coasts of Panama and Costa Rica and the five offshore oceanic islands and archipelagos in the tropical eastern Pacific are threatened with extinction, according to a study by IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and its partners. Main threats to the region's marine flora and fauna include over-fishing, habitat loss and increasing impacts from the El Niño Southern Oscillation.

Released this week, the study is the first IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ assessment available for all known species of marine shore-fish, marine mammals, sea turtles, sea birds, corals, mangroves and seagrasses in a major marine biogeographic region. The analysis identifies specific geographic zones where conservation efforts are needed most, including around the mouth of the Gulf of California and the coastlines of Panama and Costa Rica, while also identifying the nature and location of the greatest dangers to marine life.

“Understanding species vulnerability to major threats is paramount for determining how species and marine environments are likely to respond to one or more simultaneous threats,” says **Beth Polidoro, Research Associate, IUCN Marine Biodiversity Unit, and lead author of the study.** *“Identification of threatened species and patterns of threat in the tropical eastern Pacific region can help guide local and regional marine conservation priorities for biodiversity conservation, as well as serve to inform policy.”*

In recent years, at least 20 marine species have gone extinct around the world, and more than 133 local populations of marine species have suffered a similar fate. These include the disappearance of the endemic Galapagos Damselfish (*Azurina eupalama*) during the events of El Niño from 1982-1983. Drastic declines have also been documented across several marine groups, including many populations of commercial fish, coral reef fish, reef-building corals, mangroves, and seagrasses. Two commercial marine fish, the Totoaba (*Totoaba macdonaldi*) and the Giant Sea Bass (*Stereolepis gigas*) are listed as Critically Endangered, and were once common in the waters of southern California and the Gulf of California, Mexico. Both species are extremely desirable for human consumption but have limited ability to cope with severe over-fishing because they have long life spans and the large groups they form when spawning are often targeted by fishers—reducing the chances of rebuilding sustainable populations.

“Saving threatened species is the single most important thing we can do to safeguard ocean health, which benefits millions of people that depend on thriving and productive oceans,” says **Scott Henderson, Regional Director of Marine Conservation at Conservation International and co-author of the study.** *“This new study is a monumental scientific effort which gives governments and support organizations the information needed to focus conservation dollars on the species, places and problems that need help the most.”*

The findings reinforce that conservation action is needed for both marine species and the geographic areas where they are most threatened. For example, the creation of a marine protected area around Clipperton Island in the eastern Pacific Ocean should be a high priority, as it has one of the highest proportions of threatened species in the tropical eastern Pacific, and is the only one of the five oceanic islands and archipelagos in the region that lacks complete governmental protection. Legislation to limit mangrove removal from important fishery nursing grounds along the coasts of Costa Rica and Panama is also vital, according to the study. Additionally, better data collection, reporting and monitoring for both targeted and by-catch fisheries species should be an urgent priority for the improvement of marine conservation efforts throughout the region.

“There are tangible steps that we can take to curtail the risk of extinction of species in the tropical eastern Pacific,” says **Tom Brooks, NatureServe’s Chief Scientist.** *“For example, for the few fishery species that are threatened, we must work towards better management on both local and regional scales. We can make a difference, but first we must collect and use the valuable data available.”*

###

For more information or to schedule interviews please contact:

- **Maggie Roth**, IUCN Media Relations, m +1 202 262 5313, e maggie.roth@iucn.org
- **Lynne Labanne**, IUCN Species Programme Communications Officer, t +41 22 999 0153, m +41 79 527 7221, e lynne.labanne@iucn.org
- **Camellia Williams**, IUCN Species Programme Communications, t +41 22 999 0154, e camellia.williams@iucn.org
- **Kevin Connor**, Media Manager, Conservation International, t +1 703 341 2405, e kconnor@conservation.org

Notes to editors:

This study was conducted by IUCN Species Programme Marine Biodiversity Unit and partners, including the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), Conservation International (CI), Old Dominion University, NatureServe, the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies –(University of Tasmania), the Charles Darwin Foundation and the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

The paper, “*Patterns of extinction risk and threat for marine vertebrates and habitat-forming species in the Tropical Eastern Pacific*” has been accepted for publication in *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, <http://www.int-res.com/journals/meps/meps-home/>. Advance copies of the paper can be obtained from Beth Polidoro at bpolidor@odu.edu or beth.polidoro@iucn.org

Photos are available at: <https://rcpt.yousendit.com/1382933288/07436894f932e706d111f7fa840b72ba>

Live studio quality audio interviews are available for broadcasters via our ISDN line (APTX/G722). Please call +41 22 999 0115 to book an interview slot.

Tropical Eastern Pacific Red List Assessments

The Tropical Eastern Pacific Red List Assessments are a part of the Global Marine Species Assessment’s mission to complete more than 20,000 marine species assessments for inclusion on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™. The Global Marine Species Assessment Unit (GMSA), or Marine Biodiversity Unit, is a joint initiative of IUCN Species Programme and Conservation International. The GMSA is headquartered in the Department of Biology at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and is largely enabled by the generous support of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and Tom Haas.

To complete the Tropical Eastern Pacific IUCN Red List assessments, the GMSA collaborated with a wide diversity of international scientists who represent Fisheries Management Organizations, international conservation organizations, government agencies, universities, and independent fisheries research institutions. The Tropical Eastern Pacific assessments were generously supported by Tom Haas and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation and Conservation International’s Eastern Tropical Pacific Seascapes Program, in addition to the Charles Darwin Foundation, SeagrassNet, BirdLife International, the University of Costa Rica, Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, and the IUCN Species Specialist Groups (IUCN 2011). Scientific contributors to all of the seabird, marine mammal, sea turtle, marine fishes, coral, mangrove, and seagrass species assessments are acknowledged under each species on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ (www.iucnredlist.org).

Complete results of the Tropical Eastern Pacific assessments were published on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ in November 2010.

The IUCN Red List threat categories

The IUCN Red List threat categories are as follows, in descending order of threat:

Extinct or Extinct in the Wild

Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable: species threatened with global extinction;

Near Threatened: species close to the threatened thresholds or that would be threatened without ongoing specific conservation measures;

Least Concern: species evaluated with a lower risk of extinction;

Data Deficient: no assessment because of insufficient data.

Critically Endangered (Possibly Extinct): this is not a new Red List category, but is a flag developed to identify those Critically Endangered species that are in all probability already Extinct but for which confirmation is required, for example, through more extensive surveys being carried out and

failing to find any individuals.

About IUCN

IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges.

IUCN works on biodiversity, climate change, energy, human livelihoods and greening the world economy by supporting scientific research, managing field projects all over the world, and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organization, with more than 1,200 government and NGO members and almost 11,000 volunteer experts in some 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

www.iucn.org

About the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ (or the IUCN Red List) is the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of plant, fungi and animal species. It is based on an objective system for assessing the risk of extinction of a species should no conservation action be taken.

Species are assigned to one of eight categories of threat based on whether they meet criteria linked to population trend, population size and structure and geographic range. Species listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable are collectively described as 'Threatened'.

The IUCN Red List is not just a register of names and associated threat categories. It is a rich compendium of information on the threats to the species, their ecological requirements, where they live, and information on conservation actions that can be used to reduce or prevent extinctions.

The IUCN Red List is a joint effort between IUCN and its Species Survival Commission, working with the Red List partners BirdLife International; Botanic Gardens Conservation International; Conservation International; NatureServe; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Sapienza University of Rome; Texas A&M University; Wildscreen; and Zoological Society of London.

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

About the Species Survival Commission (SSC)

The SSC is the largest of IUCN's six volunteer commissions with a global membership of around 7,500 experts. The SSC advises IUCN and its members on the wide range of technical and scientific aspects of species conservation, and is dedicated to securing a future for biodiversity. The SSC consists of more than 110 Specialist Groups (SG).

<http://iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species>

About Conservation International

Building upon a strong foundation of science, partnership and field demonstration, CI empowers societies to responsibly and sustainably care for nature, our global biodiversity, for the long term well-being of people. Founded in 1987 and marking its 25th anniversary in 2012, CI has headquarters in the Washington DC area, and 900 employees working in nearly 30 countries on four continents, plus 1,000+ partners around the world. For more information, please visit at www.conservation.org, or on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

About the Eastern Tropical Pacific Seascape (ETPS)

The Eastern Tropical Pacific Seascape (ETPS) supports marine conservation and sustainable use of resources in the national waters, coasts and islands of Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Panama. At two million square kilometers (more than 770,000 square miles), the ETPS is a region of abundant and spectacular marine life with complex biogeography – including isolated islands, the convergence of numerous currents and highly productive upwelling. CI works in this region with support from the Walton Family Foundation to conserve and sustainably manage the region's high diversity, endemism and concentrations of species that support both fisheries and tourism.

About Old Dominion University

Old Dominion University is Virginia's forward-focused, public doctoral research university for high-performing students from around the world. The university has 26 research centers and a total enrollment of 24,000 students.

<http://www.odu.edu>

About NatureServe

NatureServe is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to providing the scientific basis for effective conservation action. Through its network of 82 natural heritage programs and conservation data centers in the United States, Canada, and Latin America, NatureServe provides a unique body of detailed scientific information and conservation biodiversity expertise about the plants, animals, and ecosystems of the Americas. www.natureserve.org

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, headquartered in Panama City, Panama, is a unit of the Smithsonian Institution. The Institute furthers the understanding of tropical nature and its importance to human welfare, trains students to conduct research in the tropics and promotes conservation by increasing public awareness of the beauty and importance of tropical ecosystems. Website: www.stri.si.edu