



Terms of Reference 2021-2025

IUCN Species Survival Commission
National Species Specialist Group

April 2022

Background

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), created in 1949, is a worldwide science-based network of over ten thousand volunteer experts in 175 countries, who work towards achieving *“A just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to reduce the loss of diversity of life on earth”*.

As one of IUCN’s six Commissions, SSC works together with the Secretariat and Members to build a scientific and practical foundation for the effective delivery of species conservation. SSC consists of different types of groups. **Specialist Groups** are organised either by taxonomy, geography or scientific discipline, that work across the species conservation cycle conducting threat status assessments, producing plans and policies, and catalysing or implementing conservation action. Most Specialist Groups are also the designated Red List Authority for the species in their remit. **Stand-alone Red List Authorities** are groups of experts set up purely to oversee threat assessments, while **Task Forces** are time-bound, created in response to pressing conservation issues or a particular need and aim to deliver on agreed outputs within a finite time frame. The SSC has a Steering Committee, and conservation committees (Marine, Freshwater, Plants, Invertebrates and Fungi), that provide oversight and governance to the SSC network, while the Red List Committee and Standards and Petitions Committee oversees the production and maintenance of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

The IUCN is uniquely positioned to support governments in achieving international commitments such as those of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its associated Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals, aimed at halting the net loss of species. In particular, the IUCN’s Species Survival Commission, which has >10 000 species expert scientists spread across 175 countries, has the potential to strengthen the science base for species decision making processes. In this document, we propose the establishment of a new type of SSC group, **National Species Specialist Group** (NSSG), which will most commonly be established at a national level, but can also be designated at sub-national levels (e.g. a state or province). National Species Specialist Group allows SSC members already part of taxonomic/thematic SSC Groups to organise geographically, and also allow additional experts to join the Commission without previously being affiliated to other SSC groups.

The purpose of National Species Specialist Groups will be to co-ordinate expertise across taxonomic groups in the country, to support governments and facilitate science-based decision making and the development of policies that will contribute towards halting the loss of species.

During the 2019 SSC Leaders' Meeting, participants endorsed the Abu Dhabi Call for Global Species Conservation Action requesting urgent and effective actions to address the unprecedented, unsustainable and growing impacts on wild species from human activities. It asked the global community to recognise the irreplaceable and vital role of species and their populations and massively scale up efforts to conserve all species; to ensure that their use is sustainable, and that their benefits are equitably shared. National Species Specialist Groups, if resourced adequately, can play a key role in catalysing actions within countries to guarantee the survival of all species sharing this planet.

Composition of National Species Specialist Group

A National Species Specialist Group may include researchers, government officers and conservation practitioners with leading knowledge of particular taxonomic groups or key skills within the region of interest. National Species Specialist Group should aim to include experts working on mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, freshwater fishes, marine fishes, plants, fungi and invertebrates from the marine, freshwater and terrestrial realms, based on the capacity available within the geographic area of operation. A minimum of one representative expert from the above groups is recommended, but more may be included at the discretion of the Chair of the National Species Specialist Group. Where the geographic region includes SSC experts based in existing Specialist Groups the experts selected to serve on the National Species Specialist Group would need to work synergistically with existing Specialist Groups and Stand-alone Red List Authorities as well as individual SSC members to ensure ongoing channelling of the broad base of expertise from SSC into the work of the National Species Specialist Group. The establishment of sub-groups of species experts for each taxonomic group should be considered in cases where there are large numbers of experts working on one taxonomic group, but needs to take into account and avoid duplication of any existing national bodies e.g. for birds, national partners of BirdLife International.

Members of National Species Specialist Group may be based, for example, at scientific research institutions, non-government organisations, indigenous peoples organisations, governmental agencies, or be independent professionals. Representation of experts that work across a wide range of taxonomic groups but have excellent regional knowledge of ecological communities and the impact of localised pressures, as well as those with a particular discipline focus e.g. sustainable use, human-wildlife conflict, invasive species, or climate change are encouraged.

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. In order to facilitate managing funds for the work of the National Species Specialist Group a host institution should be identified. The host institution will be expected to remain independent and not unduly influence the work of the NSSG.

Each National Species Specialist Group should inform of their advisory role to both the IUCN National Committee, should such a Committee be in place in that country, as well as to government institutions that hold the biodiversity conservation mandate. This would facilitate being called upon to inform conservation policies, to support reporting progress to biodiversity-related international conventions and agreements, as well as to develop and catalyse implementation of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) and other national conservation action plans. IUCN Regional Offices may also be involved in NSSG that fall within their region, where appropriate.

Key Activities:

The below list includes all the activities that ideally should be undertaken by NSSG and encompasses the work to address the full species conservation cycle. The SSC does however recognise that this is a significant workload and that as a network of volunteer scientists all of the below may not be possi-

ble. Each NSSG will therefore prioritise activities as per the specific needs and context of their country and according to available capacity.

Assessment:

1. Lead the national assessment process:
 - Identify which taxonomic groups from which realms to assess and monitor trends in extinction risk for, ensuring optimal representation of different taxa and realms;
 - Ensure all national red list species assessments closely follow the IUCN Guidelines for application of IUCN Red List criteria at regional and national levels: version 4.0;
 - Publish all assessments online to support decision making on an appropriate platform recognised by government as well as on the global platform for National Red List data <https://www.nationalredlist.org/>;
 - Following publication of repeat national Red List assessments, calculate national Red List Indices based on national extinction risk to allow for reporting against indicators in the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
2. Provide support to and feed information into existing global assessment processes:
 - Ensure that assessments of endemics are submitted to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, meeting all documentation and quality control standards, in close consultation with the relevant SSC Red List Authority;
 - Provide national data on status and trends of species and the results of monitoring and analyses to SSC for use in global Red List assessments, global planning processes and other relevant initiatives.
3. Provide foundational data on species for planning:
 - Collate all accurate occurrence records for threatened, near-threatened, and range-restricted species, where necessary ensuring that records in collections institutions are digitised;
 - Develop area of habitat (AOH) maps or habitat suitability occupancy models for use in planning;
 - Provide support as appropriate to Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) National Coordination Groups in their work to identify KBAs for species to ensure that KBA identification is based on species that are as taxonomically and geographically representative as possible, and use the most comprehensive and latest information on distribution and population sizes of species at sites;
 - Identify and/or provide Reviewers for KBA Proposals.

Planning:

- Support, where appropriate, the development of single and multi-species conservation plans, based on information available in the Red List assessment and other sources, and using established IUCN methods for planning;
- Ensure spatial data for threatened, near-threatened, and range-restricted species are used in all spatial planning, and assist in setting appropriate targets for species persistence, including the incorporation of KBAs. Work closely with planners to create land/waterscapes that are ecologically connected thus enabling long-term viability of species populations, including in the context of climate change (noting that the ability of species to move will be an important factor enabling them to adapt to a changing climate).

Action:

- Support the mainstreaming and integration of spatial planning outputs into development sector planning and national strategies and action plans e.g. NBSAPs;
- Develop clear guidelines and spatial tools needed to ensure species of conservation concern are accounted for during national land/sea use decision making, strengthening the country's ability to manage the environmental authorisations process (Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments);
- Support and where appropriate augment efforts by the KBA National Coordination Group,

existing NGOs and others to promote and support the establishment of new or expanded Protected Areas or Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) as appropriate in KBAs identified for species;

- Promote and support species recovery actions by providing species information, advice and expertise, including integrated (ex situ and in situ) species recovery for keystone and highly threatened species;
- Promote and support biodiverse habitat restoration actions through the provision of species information, advice and expertise;
- Provide input into the development of science-based, national or regional biodiversity conservation policies. For example, providing scientific advice on the publication of threatened and protected species listings and regulations or the listings of invasive species;
- Provide technical support, as requested, to government implementation of actions under, and reporting efforts for, species-related activities under international conventions including CBD, CITES, Ramsar, and CMS.

Monitoring and Research:

- Support, promote, contribute to, and where appropriate initiate field-based species monitoring programmes, where possible involving citizen scientists, to provide up to date information on the status and trends of species;
- Support, promote, contribute to, and where appropriate initiate monitoring of the status of populations within protected areas, OECMs and KBAs to ensure management is effectively mitigating threats to species of conservation concern;
- Promote and where appropriate, undertake research to improve understanding of the status of individual species of national populations of conservation concern, the threats impacting them and the actions needed to mitigate threats and recover populations;
- Conduct analyses to identify and quantify key drivers of national species decline, making use of Species Threat Abatement and Restoration (STAR) methodology, recommend policy interventions to address these drivers, and make these analyses publicly available;
- Assess and report on species recovery using the IUCN Green Status of Species Standard.

Principles of operation

1. Work in a complimentary manner within the national landscape of existing structures, organisations, processes, and conservation stakeholders to support their efforts, avoid duplication and where appropriate fill gaps.
2. Work synergistically with SSC thematic and taxonomic Groups, Red List Authorities, and the Red List Unit, requesting experts in these groups to:
 - Assist with training of National Species Specialist Group experts where required;
 - Review assessments of species endemic to countries, produced by National Species Specialist Group ensuring that the IUCN Rules of Procedure for the IUCN Red List are followed;
 - Provide guidance on the use of assessments produced at the global level to inform national conservation efforts.
3. Be inclusive of relevant expertise, gender, geography, background and age; seek to be representative of this diversity and transparent about inclusion.
4. Ensure that all sources of species data are mobilised, while also making use of knowledge products using Standards maintained by IUCN and its partners, including the Red List of Threatened Species, the Red List of Ecosystems, species planning guidelines and the World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas.
5. Work to fill capacity gaps by identifying emerging experts and bringing them into the group.
6. Take into consideration traditional ecological knowledge in species assessment and planning processes.

Leadership

Chair of National Species Specialist Group

The chair or co-chairs of a National Species Specialist Group will be appointed by the SSC Chair, following the process for appointment of SSC group chairs, following the SSC By-laws. The establishment of NSSG will be coordinated by the respective Regional Vice-Chair of the SSC Steering Committee, will involve the IUCN Regional Office and be supported by the SSC Chair's Office.

Chair or co-chairs of NSSG are responsible for:

- a) Coordinating the establishment of annual targets and appointing members responsible to lead each target.
- b) Seeking opportunities to provide input to relevant conservation debates and fora.
- c) Intervening on technical issues in the name of the group.
- d) Maintaining professional standards of conduct that enhance the group's professional profile, standing, contribution and effectiveness.
- e) Continuously ensuring the NSSG works synergistically with relevant SSC Groups and Red List Authorities, the Red List Unit and its Red List Partners, and seeks consensus on assessments, plans and policy advice produced.
- f) Attending IUCN National Committee meetings, where these exist, as an observer, ensuring that National Committees are kept informed of work of the NSSG and that the NSSG also responds where feasible to requests made for specialist species advice requested by the IUCN National Committee; also, reporting periodically of the results of such meetings.
- g) Appointing focal points on topical issues, such as sustainable use, policy and conservation planning. These focal points would only have authority to speak on behalf of the NSSG on issues that have been deliberated at meetings of the Species Authority.
- h) Ensuring adequate and proactive consultation and coordination with other SSC groups and the Secretariat.
- i) Working with their members and SSC regional hubs to secure resources needed to support the activities of their group.
- j) Ensuring a host institution is in place to provide administrative support to the operations of the group.
- k) Reporting on the activities of the NSSG to the SSC Chair annually as per the monitoring and reporting requirements of the SSC.

Given the significant responsibilities of this role the Chair will be required to demonstrate that they have sufficient capacity and time to dedicate to leading the National Species Specialist Group.

Conduct of the National Species Specialist Group

National Species Specialist Group may be called upon to address complex and controversial conservation issues at national level. They potentially have a powerful role, and are able to influence national/ regional policies through the provision of sound, scientifically rigorous, and unbiased technical information and arguments. Many species experts are passionate in their support of the species within their remits. In this context, there is a clear danger of members of NSSG being perceived as advocates and their integrity and credibility as technical advisors for the SSC, IUCN and others may become compromised. It is recommended that in such situations, guidance is sought from the Chair of the relevant Group Chair or if required from the SSC Steering Committee.

As such, Chairs of NSSG should be prepared to guide their members through challenging and complex issues. When speaking in the name of the NSSG, Chairs need to work in conformity with IUCN policy and should assume responsibility for the overall conduct of their group with respect to such issues. NSSG Chairs will receive, and should familiarise themselves with, the relevant policies of IUCN and the SSC.

SSC members, when engaging in activities carried out on behalf of SSC, are expected to adhere to the basic standard of conduct and behaviour as detailed in the IUCN Commissions Code of Conduct. Members of the National Species Specialist Group are required to familiarise themselves with the Code of Conduct. Should the code of conduct be breached, the SSC Chair will take remedial actions which may include changing the NSSG Chair.

Partnerships

Organisational partnerships can help to support the group's core leadership and administration but can also bolster capacity or provide extra support for groups with, for example, Red List assessments, conservation planning and/or facilitating priority actions. Partnering with organisations such as zoos, aquaria, botanic gardens, NGOs, universities or other organisations in the corporate sector can lead to sustainable, long-term support. This support may be in the form of in-kind contributions, for example: access to facilities, financial hosting, staff support, website hosting, meeting hosting or communication support. These relationships may potentially lead to financial support to deliver on joint objectives.

In return, groups offer many benefits to these organisations, for example: provision of up-to-date information, guidance on conservation priorities or approaches, boosted credibility and access to SSC's network of expertise and conservation tools.

NSSG Chairs are responsible for maintaining positive relationships with partner organisations including communicating clear expectations and deliverables and providing adequate reporting to the SSC Chairs Office and the Secretariat.

Succession

The National Species Specialist Group Chairs will serve up to two IUCN terms (4 year each term) and may be reappointed to serve additional terms should there be no other suitable candidate available and on clear indication from the membership of the National Species Specialist Group that they would like the Chair to remain. The IUCN SSC encourages succession planning within the group and Chairs should actively mentor other members to take over leadership after two terms.