

IUCN SSC Afrotheria Specialist Group



2018 Report



Galen Rathbun



Andrew Taylor

Co-Chairs

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Location/Affiliation

(1) California Academy of Sciences,
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(3) South African National Biodiversity Institute
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Number of members

34

Social networks

Twitter:

@Tweeting_Tenrec

Website:

<https://afrotheria.net/>



Mission statement

The IUCN SSC Afrotheria Specialist Group (ASG) facilitates the conservation of hyraxes, aardvarks, elephant-shrews or sengis, golden moles, tenrecs and their habitats by: (1) providing sound scientific advice and guidance to conservationists, governments, and other interested groups; (2) raising public awareness; and (3) developing research and conservation programmes.

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

If the ASG achieved all of its targets, it would be able to deliver more accurate, data-driven Red List assessments for more Afrotherian species and, therefore, be in a better position to move to conservation planning, especially for priority species.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

Red List: reassess Red List categories in species for which new information arises (e.g. Nimba Otter Shrew, *Micropotamogale lamottei*, for which we have new extent of occurrence (EOO) data) or for newly described species that may be described during the quadrennium (such as golden moles or sengis).

Research activities: (1) develop five standardised monitoring protocols for each group of Afrotherians to track trends over time and produce more data for Red List assessments; (2) complete 2-4 reassessments of taxonomy

of golden moles in species where it is necessary (e.g., *Amblysomus* and *Neamblysomus* species); (3) collect basic data for 3-4 golden mole species, including geographic distributions and natural history data; (4) conduct surveys to determine distribution and abundance of five hyrax species; (5) revise taxonomy of five hyrax species; (6) develop and assess field trials for standardised camera trapping methods to determine population estimates for giant sengis; (7) conduct surveys to assess distribution, abundance, threats and taxonomic status of the Data Deficient sengi species; (8) build on current research to determine the systematics of giant sengis, especially *Rhynchocyon* species; (9) survey Aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*) populations to determine abundance, distribution and trends; (10) conduct taxonomic studies to determine the systematics of aardvarks, with a focus on contrasting aardvarks from central African forests with southern African savanna aardvarks; (11) integrate the monitoring of tenrecs in the management of key protected areas with threatened species in order to track their status and threats and identify key conservation concerns; (12) conduct genetic studies to clarify the taxonomy and species diversity within the genus *Microgale*.

Communicate

Communication: (1) update and maintain the Afrotheria.net website; (2) produce one Afrotheria Specialist Group newsletter every year.



Etendeka Round-eared Sengi
(*Macrosclides micus*), Least Concern
Photo: G.B. Rathbun

Activities and results 2018

Assess

Red List

i. We reassessed the status of one species during 2018, the Nimba Otter Shrew. (KSR #1)

Research activities

i. To complete reassessments of taxonomy of golden moles, we need more detailed information on species' distributions and phylogenetic status, and we have not yet secured funding for the associated fieldwork. However, Dr Samantha Mynhardt (via her post-doctoral host, Professor Paulette Bloomer) has applied for the necessary funding to the Mohammed Bin Zayed Foundation and the Foundational Information Biodiversity Programme (managed by the NRF and SANBI). The outcome of such applications is pending; if successful, fieldwork to collect additional necessary data will take place later this year. (KSR #43)

ii. The Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme (FBIP) project submitted for funding aims to also collect new data on the Giant Golden Mole (*Chrysothalax trevelyani*) and cryptic *Amblysomus* lineages (possibly distinct species) in the Eastern Cape. Furthermore, we are working with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (Cobus Theron) to try to secure funding for trialing the use of sniffer dogs and drones to collect more specimens and natural history information for the two threatened *Cryptochloris* species in Namaqualand. However, funding has proven to be elusive. (KSR #12)

iii. The project to conduct surveys to determine distribution and abundance of five hyrax species is awaiting funding. The hyrax section coordinator is preparing a proposal submission to the National Geographic Society. (KSR #12)

iv. Revision of taxonomy of five hyrax species is under way, with two Specialist Group members (Hendrik Hoeck and Lukas Keller) taking the lead. (KSR #43)

v. Determination of the systematics of aardvarks is ongoing, but the project has been delayed due to an unexpected change in personnel. So far, genetic material has been collected from aardvarks in European Collections (old material, no FRESH material as it is very difficult with the new Nagoya protocol) and its quality has been checked. The material will then be used to gain the genome of "forest" and "savanna" aardvarks and compare their genetic distance, and hence their degree of relationships. Some funding is available for preliminary analysis, but if differences are detected between forest and savanna aardvarks, much more detailed and expensive sequencing will be required, and this will require a new source of funding. (KSR #43)

vi. Genetic studies to clarify the taxonomy and species diversity within the genus *Microgale* are ongoing, with a manuscript in review and several more in various stages of preparation. Many newly circumscribed species will be published over the next few years. (KSR #43)

Communicate

Communication

i. Updating and maintenance of the Afrotheria.net website is ongoing. Galen Rathbun, our Co-Chair, always paid for the maintenance of the website. Galen died in April 2019, so we will have to make arrangements to maintain the website. (KSR #28)

ii. Our annual newsletter was successfully completed in September 2018, and we are currently looking for submissions for the 2019 edition. (KSR #28)

Acknowledgements

We thank our Afrotheria Specialist Group members, all of whom are volunteers, who contributed towards the successful updating of the Red Lists and the annual newsletter. In particular, we are grateful to our section coordinators, Gary Bronner, Lee Koren, Thomas Lehmann, Voahangy Soarimalala, Link Olson and PJ Stephenson, as well as our newsletter editors Chris and Mathilde Stuart. We also thank Avian Designs for supporting our website at discounted rates. Finally, we remember our group founder and long-time co-chair Galen Rathbun, who died in April 2019.

Summary of activities 2018

Species Conservation Cycle ratio: 2/5

Assess **7** ██████████

Communicate **2** ███

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 12, 28, 43

KSR: Key Species Result