

# IUCN SSC Wildlife Health Specialist Group

2019 Report



Richard Kock



William B. Karesh

## Co-Chairs

Richard Kock (1)  
William B. Karesh (2)

## Location/Affiliation

(1) Royal Veterinary College, London, UK  
(2) EcoHealth Alliance, New York, US

## Number of members

262

## Social networks

Facebook:  
IUCN SSC Wildlife Health Specialist Group  
Twitter: @IUCNWildHealth  
Website: [www.iucn-whsg.org](http://www.iucn-whsg.org)



## Mission statement

The group is commissioned to serve as a first response for wildlife health concerns relevant to conservation around the world. The focus of the group is on health impacts that relate to the conservation of species, some of which are negative to wildlife population persistence and a risk to threatened species.

## Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

By the end of 2020, we envision wildlife health will be recognised as a critically important dimension of species survival, enabling the SSC to more proactively and effectively manage wildlife disease threats and threats to wildlife health from human activities, spill over of domestic animals and human diseases or inappropriate reactions to wildlife disease events. We will focus our efforts on policies that support prevention and management of disease, including disease-specific recommendations (e.g. to governments), as well as simplified processes to facilitate timely international movement of emergency diagnostic specimens for conservation purposes under CITES and in terms of growing restrictions to timely diagnosis under Nagoya Protocols and similar initiatives. We apply the IUCN-OIE Guidelines for Wildlife Disease Risk Analysis as well as embed wildlife health considerations in future IUCN and United Nations (Convention on Migratory

Species (CMS), Global Environmental Outlook (GEO), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), etc.) knowledge products to help proactively reduce disease risks and impacts of human activities on wildlife health. Through our regionally-diverse expert membership, we will aggregate information on wildlife disease events and adverse impacts on wildlife health as well as provide technical support on investigations of key wildlife morbidity and mortality events for enhanced understanding of disease pathways and drivers to inform conservation action. Through our ongoing work with international and regional partners (e.g. UN CBD, World Health Organization (WHO), Wildlife Disease Association, World Organisation for Animal Health, UNEP GEO, UNEP CMS), we will continue to highlight and raise awareness of the links between the health of humans, animals and the environment and showcase how 'One Health' approaches can help mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services.

## Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

### Assess

Red List: ten technical assessments delivered to SSC taxonomic groups.

Research activities: five wildlife mass morbidity/mortality events investigated.

### Plan

Policy: policy for simplified process for international movement of emergency diagnostic specimens of conservation species adopted.

### Act

Technical advice: ten technical recommendations delivered.



The biologists and vets are working on saiga calves measuring, weighing and carrying out veterinary research on their health and examining forensically any sick or dead animals during the mass calving event  
Photo: R. Kock

## Network

Documents review: ten SSC documents reviewed.

Membership: expand WHSG membership representation to 100 countries.

Synergy: ten external outreach events/materials/forums (e.g. policy conventions, social media) delivered showcasing relevance of wildlife health to One Health.

## Activities and results 2019

### Assess

#### Research activities

- i.** Ongoing collaboration with the Vulture Specialist Group and Wildlife Poisoning Listserv to assess health impacts of target and non-target poisoning. (KSR #7, 32)
- ii.** Our research has contributed to determine that translocations of red squirrels to mainland UK destinations are counterproductive for conservation efforts and a concern on welfare grounds. (KSR #7, 32)
- iii.** Conducted analysis of wildlife disease event reports to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) by species Red List status. (KSR #7, 32)
- iv.** Continued research on Saiga mortality events including both Haemorrhagic septicaemia, and Goat Plague (PPR) and Lumpy Skin Disease. (KSR #23)

**v.** Collaboration with Vulture Specialist Group on stocktaking and policy recommendations regarding diclofenac use. (KSR #23)

**vi.** Review of wildlife disease morbidity and mortality event reporting and monitoring systems, including analysis of the past 10 years of data reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and other systems to identify key gaps and recommendations for improved tracking and event determination. (KSR #23)

**vii.** Published piece 'Is It Time To Reflect, Not On The "What" But The "Why" In Emerging Wildlife Disease Research?' in the *Journal of Wildlife Diseases*. (KSR #32)

### Plan

#### Policy

**i.** CITES resolution adopted (simplified procedures for permits and certificates) at COP18, providing a pathway to facilitate expedited sample movements to promote timely diagnostics in disease emergencies. This is a successful outcome of our group's work on this issue for the past several years. Following the passage of the resolution, WHSG leadership met with the CITES Secretariat point of contact in November 2019 to explore next steps for ensuring effective implementation. (KSR #26)

## Act

### Technical advice

- i.** WHSG South America Regional Coordinator Dr Marcela Uhart led a team from Argentina on a publication documenting the impacts of lead pollution from hunting ammunition on waterfowl, wetland ecosystems, and public health, providing key policy recommendations and building on their decade-long effort engaging stakeholders on the issue: Uhart, M., et al. (2019). Lead pollution from hunting ammunition in Argentina and current state of lead shot replacement efforts. *Ambio* 48:1015–1022. [DOI: 10.1007/s13280-019-01178-x]. (KSR #26, 27)
- ii.** WHSG held a workshop on 'Mainstreaming Wildlife Health for Conservation Management' preceding the IUCN SSC Leaders' Meeting (October 2019, Abu Dhabi) with Specialist Group leaders (Antelope, Canid, Conservation Translocation, Coral, Asian Rhinos, Vulture) to identify specialist group needs and areas of focus for WHSG support and present main recommendations at the SSC Leaders' Plenary presentation. (KSR #26, 27)
- iii.** Co-organised session on wildlife health and wildlife poisoning with the Vulture Specialist Group and the Wildlife Poisoning and Health Forum with key recommendations for biodiversity-relevant One Health strategies. (KSR #26, 27)

## Network

### Documents review

**i.** Provided input to draft SSC documents, including the IUCN Policy on Synthetic Biology and Biodiversity Conservation and outputs of the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework working group. (KSR #23, 26)

Panoramic view of team doing transect work locating saiga calves in 2019 as part of wildlife health research activities including IUCN WHSG members supporting the team from Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity

Kazakhstan and the Astana Veterinary Reference Laboratory. The site is extremely remote and close to the Ural Sea in Kazakhstan  
Photo: R. Kock



View of a spring, with tall reed grass below the escarpment of the Irghiz region of Kazakhstan, a remote wild area where saiga antelope thrive. The accommodation is simple and includes a weather station (with resident crow) to record conditions that sometimes influence mortality events  
Photo: R. Kock

Participants at the “Mainstreaming Wildlife Health for Conservation Management” workshop held October 2019  
Photo: WHSG



**ii.** We collaborated with the Antelope Specialist Group on a proposed WCC motion consistent with a One Health approach, “Strengthening mutual benefits of livestock and wildlife in shared landscapes”, helping to coordinate a diverse range of viewpoints and co-sponsors to promote multi-sectoral synergies for conservation and health. (KSR #23, 26)

**iii.** Recommended expert for analysing and prioritising pathways of introduction of exotic pathogens with IUCN and IUCN Invasive Species Specialist Group. (KSR #23, 26)

#### Membership

**i.** Added our first member from Bangladesh, and appointed a new regional coordinator to enhance regional communications and networks. Overall, we have members in 86 countries.

#### Synergy

**i.** Submitted statement on lead ammunition and fishing weights to the European Chemicals Agency under their call for evidence. (KSR #29)

**ii.** Served on delegation to Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) Steering Group meetings (February and April 2019, The Netherlands and the World Bank headquarters), successfully integrating the environment sector into the GHSA Roadmap to 2024. (KSR #29)

**iii.** Served on IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management Task Force on Ecosystems and Human Health to promote One Health synergies and ensure species and wildlife health-specific considerations are integrated. (KSR #29)

### **Communicate**

#### Communication

**i.** Presented on ‘Integrating Environment for Global Health Security Gains’ at Global Health Security conference (June 2019, Sydney, Australia). (KSR #28)

**ii.** Presented on drivers of emerging diseases and the need for coordinated biodiversity and health surveillance and risk communication at the West African Health Organization Technical Meeting on One Health (October 2019, Lome, Togo). (KSR #28)

**iii.** Organised workshop on ‘Operationalising One Health in Cote d’Ivoire’, emphasising wildlife disease surveillance and multi-sectoral coordination (May 2019, Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire). (KSR #28)

**iv.** Presented on ‘Integrating Environment for Global Health Security Gains’ at the American Public Health Association conference (November 2019, Philadelphia, US). (KSR #28)

**v.** Participated in expert Biosecurity Symposium hosted by the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (January 2019, Toronto, Canada), which focused on transnational environmental crime. (KSR #28)

**vi.** Integrated wildlife-sensitive messaging in disaster assistance consortium project focused on disease emergency response. (KSR #28)

### **Acknowledgements**

We thank the following donors that provided core funding for the group’s activities (e.g. website administration, membership outreach, article publication, expert participation in UN policy fora): USAID Emerging Pandemic Threats PREDICT-2 project, EcoHealth Alliance, and the Royal Veterinary College, as well as Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi and IUCN SSC in supporting a wildlife health workshop held in October 2019. We are grateful for the assistance of Ms. Amanda Andre.

### **Summary of activities 2019**

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 5/5

Assess	7	
Plan	1	
Act	3	
Network	7	
Communicate	6	

Main KSRs addressed: 7, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32

Resolutions addressed: WCC-2016-Res-014 and WCC-2016-Res-064

KSR: Key Species Result