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The revised Red List of mammals reveals larger battles for conservation

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) are excited to launch the 2016 Red List of Mammals of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. This Red List provides an up-to-date assessment of the state of our mammals, of which 57 (17%) are deemed to be threatened with extinction and 34 (10%) are Near Threatened. The general public will not be familiar with many of our threatened species as they have restricted ranges and are rarely seen, such as the Golden Moles (order Afrosoricida) or the endemic White-tailed Rat (*Mystromys albicaudatusi*).

Overall, 331 species, subspecies or subpopulations were assessed, compared to 295 in the 2004 assessment, where 19% of taxa were threatened and 13% were Near Threatened. While it appears that there are proportionately fewer threatened species currently, most of these changes were non-genuine due to improved knowledge on their distribution, abundance and taxonomy. However, of the genuine changes detected thus far, 19 (66%) are uplistings (more threatened). This indicates that no net conservation gains have been made over the past decade.

Life on Earth is undergoing its sixth major extinction crisis. To understand this crisis, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) established the Red List in 1963 to objectively categorise the probability of extinction for every species on the planet. Assessments are carried out through vast networks of scientists, conservationists and other stakeholders pooling their knowledge. Red Lists have become the backbone of global conservation as a unified and standardised tool to measure biodiversity loss and inform policy and conservation planning. The 2016 Red List of Mammals of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland was produced by the EWT and SANBI, with collaboration from the universities of Cape Town and Pretoria's MammalMAP and the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), provincial and national conservation agencies, museums and universities.

The threats that mammals face are broad and complex, and conservationists must tackle multiple ongoing challenges to address them effectively. Habitat loss from agricultural, industrial (including renewable energy) and human settlement expansion continues to impact on key habitats, such as grasslands and wetlands. This expansion also fragments remaining habitats, with most of our larger species left isolated in fenced-off protected areas. Compounding this, climate change is projected to increase drought conditions in the western parts of South Africa and to reduce the amount of specific habitats, such as Afromontane grasslands (impacting the Forest Shrews *Myosorex* spp. amongst others) and ephemeral wetlands (impacting Roan Antelope *Hippotragus equinus* amongst others).

Agricultural, industrial and settlement expansion also tend to increase the rates of damaging human activities, such as fuelwood harvesting, overgrazing, pollution, electric fence erection and water abstraction, that continue to threaten species that rely on productive and connected habitats such as grasslands, wetlands and riparian corridors. This impacts many species, including the Riverine Rabbit (*Bunolagus monticularis* – Critically Endangered), African Striped Weasel (*Poecilogale albinucha* – Near Threatened) and Spotted-necked Otter (*Hydrictis maculicollis* – Vulnerable).

Expansion of human settlements, especially along protected area edges, also likely increases hunting intensity for bushmeat and/or traditional medicine and cultural regalia, as well as increasing the number of animals killed incidentally in snares, which impacts species ranging from African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus* – Endangered) and Leopard (*Panthera pardus* – Vulnerable) to Temminck's Ground Pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii* – Vulnerable) and Mountain Reedbuck (*Redunca fulvorufula* – Endangered).

Similarly, the expanding scale of illegal sport hunting with dogs directly threatens many species, such as Oribi (*Ourebia ourebi* – Endangered). Compounding this is the emerging threat of international wildlife trafficking syndicates that are beginning to heavily impact on species desired for overseas markets, such as rhinos (White Rhino, *Ceratotherium simum* – Near Threatened; and Black Rhino, *Diceros bicornis* – Endangered) and pangolins.

However, it is not all doom and gloom. South Africa boasts some real conservation success stories, often driven by cooperation between conservationists and the private sector. The Bontebok (*Damaliscus pygargus pygargus* – Vulnerable), for example, was saved from the brink of extinction by a few prescient landowners in Bredasdorp, and today both the Cape Mountain Zebra (*Equus zebra zebra*) and the South African populations of African Lion (*Panthera leo*) have been listed as Least Concern, due largely to their expansion on private protected areas. Innovative interventions such as the Badger Friendly Honey Programme, livestock guarding dogs and biodiversity stewardship schemes are beginning to have a positive impact on many species, from Honey Badgers (*Mellivora capensis* – Least Concern) to Oribi.

Conservationists will continue to fight to protect all our species and landscapes. Citizens can help mammal conservation by contributing to citizen science projects, such as submitting sightings (especially outside protected areas), to virtual museum platforms (such as MammalMAP and iSpot), dropping internal fences to form conservancies (especially relevant for landowners) and simply visiting our many formally protected areas so that they can better perform their functions.

Overall, South African mammals exemplify contrasting trends in conservation. While many species are increasing in number and geographical distribution thanks to protected area expansion, biodiversity stewardship and private wildlife ownership, many others are declining, even within protected areas, due to ongoing habitat loss and degradation of sensitive environments, wildlife trafficking, and

bushmeat hunting. For example, White and Black Rhino, Leopard, Mountain Reedbuck and Humpback Dolphin (*Sousa plumbea* – Endangered) all have a worse conservation status in 2016 than in 2004.

The 2016 Mammal Red List of South Africa Lesotho and Swaziland forms part of a series of national Red List projects recently completed by SANBI and partners, which include butterflies, reptiles and birds. The revision was made possible by over 400 experts who provided their data and expertise to inform each assessment. It was funded via the South African National Biodiversity Institute (through a grant by the Norwegian Government that aims to build capacity in the southern Africa region for undertaking assessments), the Endangered Wildlife Trust, the Department of Environmental Affairs, E Oppenheimer & Son and De Beers Group of Companies. The summary 2016 listings are available at https://www.ewt.org.za/Reddata/reddata.html and the full assessment accounts for all species will be released in early 2017.

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