

# Executive Summary

The new Equid Action Plan provides summaries of the conservation status, biology, and ecology of wild zebras, asses, and horses. During the Pleistocene, equids were the most abundant, medium-sized grazing animals of the grasslands and steppes of Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Today there remain only seven species and many of these species are at risk.

In Africa, the African wild ass (*Equus africanus*) is Critically Endangered (CR), the Grévy's zebra (*Equus grevyi*) and the mountain zebra (*Equus zebra*) are Endangered (EN), and the plains zebra (*Equus burchellii*) is dependent on conservation support (LRcd). In Asia, the Asiatic wild ass (*Equus hemionus*) is Vulnerable (VU) and half of the extant subspecies are Critically Endangered (CR). The kiang (*Equus kiang*) is considered at Lower Risk (LR), but data are inadequate for the assessment of the status of two of the three subspecies (DD). The Przewalski's horse (*Equus ferus przewalski*), or Takhi, exists in captivity, but is extinct in the wild (EW). Successful reintroduction projects for the Takhi are occurring in Mongolia and China.

The 2002 Red List of Threatened Species: Equids can be found in Appendix 1. Assessments were made in 1996 using 1994 Categories and Criteria (version 2.3) and in 2001 using the 2001 Red List Categories and Criteria (version 3.1). Version 3.1 is available in Appendix 2.

The majority of species in this small family are endangered or vulnerable. Most of the endangered equids live in desert ecosystems. These habitats are not rich in species, but do contain unique and endemic animals and plants. Zebras, asses, and horses can serve as 'flagship' species for the conservation of desert ecosystems and their biodiversity. Equids persist in some of the harshest climates and terrains in the world. These arid habitats are also home to human populations that are also at risk from climatic extremes. Conservation of wildlife will be closely linked to local nomadic pastoralists being able to participate in, and benefit from, the conservation management of their areas.

The Action Plan presents the current state of knowledge for all seven species, specifying what information is lacking,

and prioritising conservation action. For all the zebras, asses, and horses better information is needed on 1) national and local population status and trends, 2) genetic definition of subspecies, 3) genetic viability of isolated and reintroduced populations, 4) behavioral ecology, resource requirements, disease epidemiology, and demography, 5) risk assessment of geographically distinct populations, and 6) socio-economics and viability of alternative conservation/utilisation strategies.

The Action Plan also provides chapters on equid taxonomy, genetics, reproductive biology, and population dynamics. These chapters highlight unsolved issues of taxonomy and genetics. They also provide information and insight into the special demographic and genetic challenges of managing small populations. The chapter on disease provides a review of documented equid disease and epidemiology and focuses on priorities for equid conservation health. The final chapter deals with the importance of developing an assessment methodology that explicitly considers the role of equids in ecosystems and the ecological processes that are necessary for ecosystem viability. The chapter describes how a spatial ecosystem model can be used to assess a wild horse population and its habitat, and it demonstrates how such an approach could be used for equid conservation and used to assess the effects of different equid population sizes and climate scenarios on population dynamics and ecosystem health. The approach of combining ecological field studies and ecosystem modelling should prove useful for the scientific management and conservation of wild equids worldwide. These chapters provide research and conservation practitioners with new information and paradigms.

The plan provides recommendations for action that we hope will assist researchers, management authorities, government agencies, donor organisations, and local resource users to prioritise and activate conservation on threatened and endangered equids in their native habitats.

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