

WELCOME TO THE IUCN SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION (SSC)

Firstly, we would like to extend our warm congratulations for having been invited to join the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC). You have been invited to join an international network of experts that make up the largest of the six IUCN volunteer Commissions. The structure and functioning of the SSC may appear complex at first, so we have put together this introductory document to provide you with a clear overview of the SSC.

The Species Survival Commission was established by the IUCN (The World Conservation Union) almost six decades ago. Since that time, the Commission has grown into a global, science-based network of thousands of volunteer experts, working together towards achieving the vision of “*A world that values and conserves present levels of biodiversity*”.

The major role of the SSC is to provide information to IUCN on the conservation of species and on the inherent value of species and their role in:

- ecosystem health and functioning,
- the provision of ecosystem services and
- the provision of support to human livelihoods.

The tangible products produced by the SSC are the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, the Species Information Service (SIS), species Action Plans, technical guidelines and contributions to IUCN policy statements. The Commission delivers and promotes this technical knowledge, advice and policy guidance to those who can influence the implementation of conservation action across the world.

The IUCN Red List and SIS

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species. It uses a set of criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species and subspecies. These criteria are relevant to all species and all regions of the world. With its strong scientific base, the IUCN Red List is recognised as the most authoritative guide to the status of biological diversity. The overall aim of the Red List is to convey the urgency and scale of conservation problems to the public and policy makers, and to motivate the global community to reduce species extinctions. The List is an essential part of the toolkit needed to guide conservation priorities and move towards the sustainable use of our natural resources.

The SSC holds the world's most complete body of information on the status of species, most notably of those threatened with extinction. To manage the collection of this information and to facilitate its use, the SSC is developing the Species Information Service (SIS). The SIS aims to become a worldwide species information resource managed by SSC's network of Specialist Groups. In the coming years, SSC will focus on using the Red List and the SIS as crucial tools to carry out key taxonomic, regional and global assessments, to develop indicators and to monitor trends in global biodiversity loss.

SSC Conservation Action Plans

The SSC Conservation Action Plan series is one of the world's most respected sources of information on species and their conservation needs. Developed by SSC's Specialist Groups, Action Plans identify threats to groups of species and the actions required at all levels to reduce or eliminate those threats. For a more detailed overview of the action planning process, see "What does IUCN species action planning contribute to the conservation process?" by Fuller *et al.* (2003)¹.

Technical Guidelines

The technical guidelines produced by the SSC provide guidance to specialised conservation projects and initiatives, such as re-introducing animals into their former ranges, handling confiscated specimens and halting the spread of invasive species. All policy statements and technical guidelines are available on the SSC website (see <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/pubs/policy/index.htm>) in English, French and Spanish.

VISION, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SSC

The Commission's **Strategic Plan** (2001 – 2010) provides the basic building blocks for the work of the Commission. Its general framework is as follows:

Vision

A world that values and conserves present levels of biodiversity

Goal

The extinction crisis and massive loss in biodiversity are universally adopted as a shared responsibility, resulting in action to reduce this loss of diversity within species, among species and of ecosystems.

Objectives

1. Decisions and policies affecting biodiversity influenced by sound interdisciplinary scientific information;
2. Modes of production and consumption that promote the conservation of biodiversity adopted by users of natural resources;
3. Capacity increased to provide timely, innovative, and practical solutions to conservation problems.

GOVERNANCE OF THE SSC

The **Chair** of the Commission is elected by the membership of IUCN at each World Conservation Congress, heads the Commission for the three to four year intersessional period and serves as a member of IUCN Council. The Chair is supported by a **Steering Committee**, which advises the Chair and provides strategic vision and direction to the work of the Commission. Certain members of the Steering Committee also serve as focal points for **Sub-Committees**, which focus on particular themes. Each Sub-Committee provides direction and guidance to the Commission's overall work in that specific conservation area and in particular to the associated Specialist Groups.

SSC AND THE IUCN SECRETARIAT

The SSC is institutionally linked to the IUCN **Species Programme**, one of several IUCN thematic programmes (see the attached organogram for more information on the structural organisation of the Species Programme within the IUCN). The Species Programme is responsible for supporting the activities of the SSC's Specialist Groups and network-wide initiatives. The Species Programme forms part of the IUCN Secretariat and is based in their international headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. The Species Programme is further divided into a number of initiatives, namely the Wildlife Trade, the Red List and the Freshwater Biodiversity Assessment Initiatives (located in Cambridge, UK), and the Global Biodiversity Assessment Initiative located in Washington DC, USA.

IUCN also has Regional and Country offices in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe, each implementing the Union's Programme in their respective territories. Working with the IUCN Secretariat, including Regional and Country Offices, thematic programmes and IUCN Members, the SSC is committed to the delivery of a "single" IUCN Programme, as approved at the 3rd World Conservation Congress in November 2004.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING OF THE SSC MEMBERSHIP

Membership structure

The Commission's strength and relevance comes from its network of experts who volunteer their time and expertise to produce the scientific and practical foundation on which the effective delivery of conservation is built, both within the IUCN and beyond. The bulk of the volunteer network is deployed in over 100 **Specialist Groups** and **Task Forces**, which are the main working units of the Commission and provide the breadth of expertise and commitment that drives the SCC towards achieving its objectives. These Groups are unique blends of individuals who operate independently, but are committed to SSC's vision, mission, objectives and policies and to those of the IUCN.

The majority of SSC's Specialist Groups cover the conservation of particular taxa or groups of taxa from orchids to amphibians, crocodiles to tigers. Others have a regional focus or are concerned with interdisciplinary issues such as wildlife health, re-introductions, sustainable use, invasive species and conservation breeding. Task Forces differ from Specialist Groups in that they are convened in response to pressing conservation issues and aim to deliver on agreed outputs within a finite time frame.

Restructuring the SSC

The SSC Chair, with the support of the Steering Committee, has established a dedicated Task Force within the Steering Committee to work on restructuring the Commission into a stronger and more effective network for achieving its conservation objectives. Taking into account the relevant findings of the 2001 Study on Voluntarism in the SSC and the Commission's vision, goals and objectives, the Restructuring Task Force aims to review the current structure of the Commission and make suggestions on modes and means for optimising and rationalising the Commission's structure and ability to deliver on its three strategic objectives.

While some changes have already been made to the structure of the Commission's expert volunteer network with the recent appointments of Specialist Group and Task Force Chairs and members, we anticipate that the Restructuring Task Force may take a year or more to complete its work. Please bear in mind, therefore, that further changes to the Commission's Specialist Groups and Task Forces may be made as an outcome of this process.

Functioning of members within the SSC

Specialist Groups and Task Forces, comprised of conservation scientists and practitioners, monitor the status of species within their remit, identify threats to these species and prioritise and promote the necessary conservation actions at all levels. They also provide scientific advice to conservation organisations, government agencies and other IUCN members, and support the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements like CBD, CITES and CMS. The SSC is widely known for its issue-related work carried out by its disciplinary Specialist Groups. The Invasive Species SG for example is spearheading IUCN's work in this field and has developed an impressive database and issued guidelines to help combat the spread of alien invasive species, while the Sustainable Use SG is at the heart of IUCN's work on promoting best practices for the sustainable use of species and natural resources.

Individual members of SSC's Specialist Groups conduct research and implement a range of conservation activities in the field. Through its Specialist Groups and Task Forces, the SSC builds the collective capacity of its members, enhancing their ability to respond to the challenges facing the conservation of biodiversity. Reciprocally, through the SSC, members have a direct link to the major international conservation fora, in which the IUCN plays a key role, and also the opportunity to connect and collaborate with colleagues working on similar issues around the world. Such linkages enable individual members to contribute more effectively to combined conservation actions globally, as well as in their own region, country and locality.

BENEFITS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF SSC MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the SSC is based on mutual benefits and reciprocal advantages. Membership offers opportunities for individuals to work with others to contribute to species conservation and be part of a well-respected and highly effective body of experts. Often the greatest reward that SSC members feel is the ability to contribute their own particular expertise to the global conservation effort and the aggregation of their knowledge for higher-level impact.

In brief, SSC membership provides the following benefits:

- The ability to influence policy and decision making within the individual Specialist Group, the SSC, IUCN and beyond;
- Leveraged and amplified effectiveness on conservation issues;
- Contribution to the global authority on the conservation status of plants and animals - the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™
- Contribution to *Species*, the widely distributed bi-annual publication of SSC;
- Up-to-date information on the most important threats to biodiversity and the actions being taken to mitigate these threats;
- Communication with a global network of experts within and outside a members own field of expertise;
- Affiliation with the single largest professional body of species experts in the world, and, correspondingly;
- Professional honour and peer recognition.

Other benefits of membership include:

- The SSC Directory of Members;
- One-third discount off IUCN Publications;
- Meeting attendance: Specialist Group Meetings, IUCN Regional Meetings, SSC Regional Meetings and SSC Commission-wide meetings, usually held in conjunction with the IUCN World Conservation Congress are open to SSC members²; and
- Access to information exchange through e-mail, dedicated listservs, E-bulletin, Specialist Group newsletters, and the IUCN/SSC and Specialist Group websites.

The major responsibility of SSC members is to maintain contact with their Specialist Group Chair and respond promptly to requests that help the SSC to pursue its objectives in a timely manner. For example, this may include contributing to reviews of draft SSC technical guidelines and CITES listing proposals or providing other species-conservation advice and tools, such as training and workshop materials. The SSC also requests the services of Specialist Groups in providing Red List assessments of the species within their remit. This is one of the most valuable contributions that Specialist Groups make to the SSC and members are asked to familiarise themselves with the IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria and to respond to requests to assist their Specialist Group Chair with these assessments.

In general, SSC Specialist Group members have the responsibility to contribute to their Specialist Group for the purpose of raising the profile and credibility of the Commission's work and their own species conservation priorities amongst relevant audiences. It is important to note that Specialist Groups are not advocacy bodies per se - they are providers of sound, defensible, technical information. Therefore, while Specialist Group or Task Force members may communicate the work of a Specialist Group or Task Force, only the Chair of a Specialist Group or Task Force is authorised to speak on behalf of the Group, directly and over his/her own signature under the Group's letterhead. Likewise, a Specialist Group or Task Force Chair will only speak on behalf of the SSC or IUCN when authorised to do so.

ADVICE AND FURTHER INFORMATION

On their appointment, SSC Specialist Group and Task Force Chairs each signed against a defined set of deliverables laid out in a revised SSC Specialist Group and Task Force Chair's **Terms-of-Reference 2005-2008**. The Chairs were provided with an **Operational Guidelines and Advice** document, which expands on the topics covered in the Terms-of-Reference and presents the accumulated wisdom of a number of experts with many years of SSC and Specialist Group experience. We hope that these Guidelines will assist Chairs in successfully leading their Group and realising their objectives.

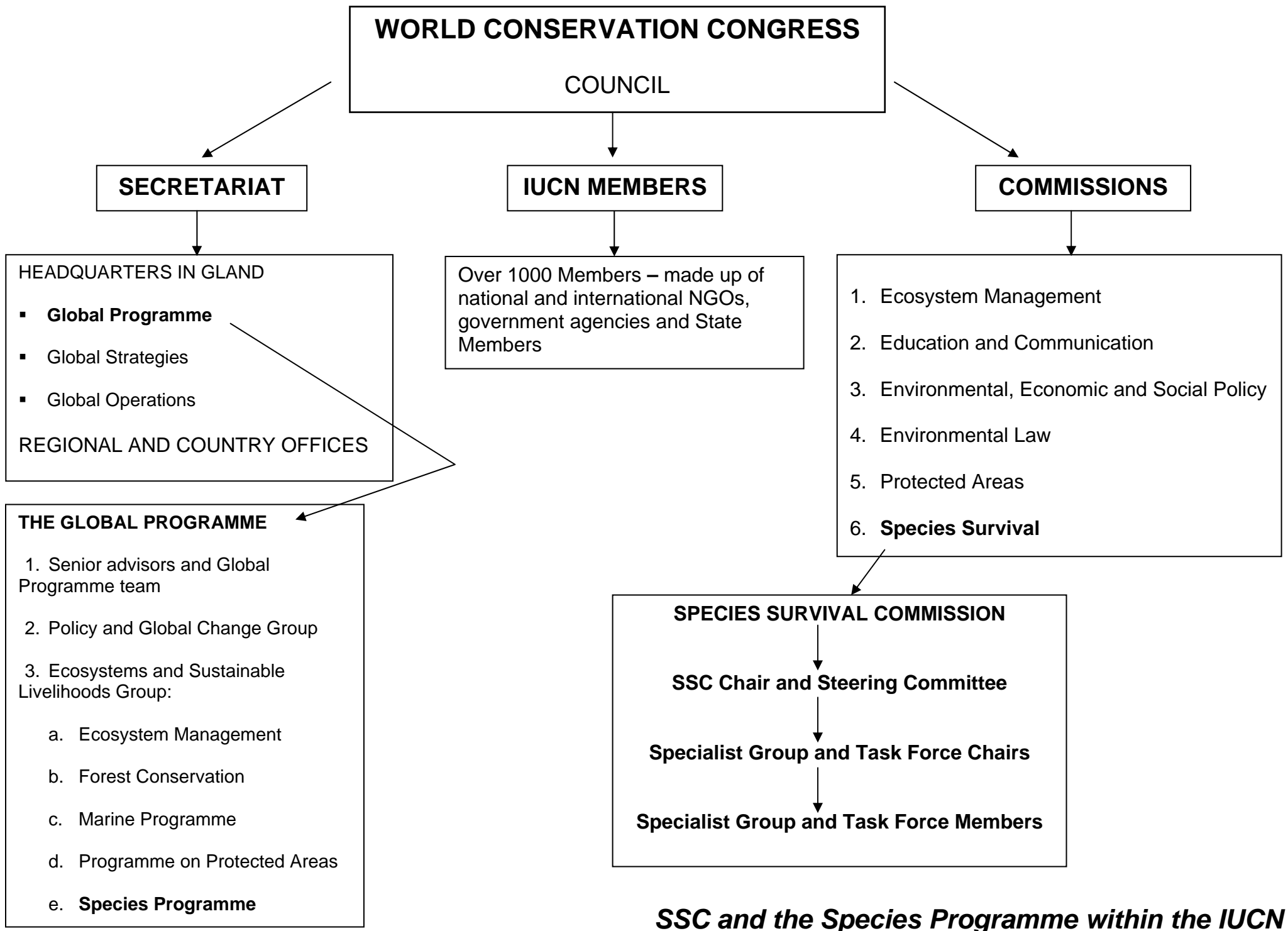
We recommend that you contact your Specialist Group or Task Force Chair for guidance and advice regarding your membership and the expected deliverables of your Group. Please bear in mind that, due to the size of our membership, the SSC and Species Programme staff are not able to communicate directly with individual Group members on general matters. Further information on the SSC can be found at [<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc>], with specific information for new members available within the "SSC Members Toolkit".

Your invitation to join the IUCN Species Survival Commission is based on your considerable expertise, which we believe will add value to the work of the Commission. We sincerely hope that you will accept your invitation to contribute to the world's greatest source of information about species, their importance, their conservation threats and their conservation needs.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Richard A. Fuller, Philip J.K. McGowan, John P. Carroll, Rene´ W.R.J. Dekker and Peter J. Garson. 2003. What does IUCN species action planning contribute to the conservation process? *Biological Conservation* 112: 343–349.

² Please note that meeting attendance is usually at the member's own expense.



WORLD CONSERVATION CONGRESS
COUNCIL

SECRETARIAT

HEADQUARTERS IN GLAND

- **Global Programme**
- Global Strategies
- Global Operations

REGIONAL AND COUNTRY OFFICES

THE GLOBAL PROGRAMME

1. Senior advisors and Global Programme team
2. Policy and Global Change Group
3. Ecosystems and Sustainable Livelihoods Group:
 - a. Ecosystem Management
 - b. Forest Conservation
 - c. Marine Programme
 - d. Programme on Protected Areas
 - e. **Species Programme**

IUCN MEMBERS

Over 1000 Members – made up of national and international NGOs, government agencies and State Members

COMMISSIONS

1. Ecosystem Management
2. Education and Communication
3. Environmental, Economic and Social Policy
4. Environmental Law
5. Protected Areas
6. **Species Survival**

SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION

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SSC Chair and Steering Committee

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Specialist Group and Task Force Chairs

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Specialist Group and Task Force Members

SSC and the Species Programme within the IUCN