



**SSC's FUTURE DESIGN:
THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO KNOW**

**An Overview for SSC Specialist Group Chairs and
Stand-Alone RLA Focal Points**

December 2007

A letter from the Species Survival Commission Chair

Our Species Survival Commission network is almost 60 years old. Thanks to you and the many thousands of volunteers through our history, we have made major contributions to species conservation and are poised to make more. Our Red List is the gold standard for species status assessments and the Specialist Groups you lead increasingly provide the key expert advice and input that feeds national and international policy and many global and local actions on the ground.

In the meantime, IUCN, our parent organization has expanded its global policy, convening, and facilitating profile and impact. It is also in the process of uniting around 'One Programme' and seeking ways to get more synergies from the many and powerful IUCN parts (Regions, Commissions, and Secretariat, government and NGO members). SSC's and IUCN's growth and maturation parallel the shift of biodiversity and conservation issues from obscurity to increased local, national, regional, and international prominence.

Today, ours is a network of over 7,000 species and conservation experts from most parts of the globe. Some have called our network an army – with members who are active and members “in reserve.” It is mighty and powerful, but it has also grown organically. This is a strength because our members are passionate and willing to volunteer to do important work -- often without the pay and tangible recognition they could receive in commercial or other NGO situations. But our organic growth also creates coordination and support problems and raises inevitable questions related to whether we can lead ourselves and others into the future.

To answer questions like these, I established an SSC Restructuring Task Force in 2005 to examine how we can ensure we are well prepared to move into the future. The Task Force reviewed conclusions of the many external and internal evaluations and needs assessment studies that SSC and IUCN have conducted over the last ten years, including studies where we asked you and your group members to tell us what you do and how you see the SG/SSC relationship (e.g., the Voluntarism Study of 2001 and a telephonic Chairs survey in 2007). The Task Force concluded that it was time to redesign the SSC to ensure it is better able to function in light of the variety of changes occurring around and within the conservation community. The Steering Committee has just approved the redesign. It is fully described in a detailed report, *The IUCN Species Survival Commission: Design for the Future*, available at: http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/for_members/chair_meeting_2008/meeting_docs.htm

This brief report, in question and answer format, is for you as a Specialist Group Chair or stand-alone RLA Focal Point. It presents the major features and rationale for the planned SSC organisation design. There are implications for everyone in SSC as well as for others in IUCN. For some roles and groups, the changes may be major. Others may need to decide how to more clearly focus their skills and interests. For others, there may be little change in practice, but perhaps a shift in perspective regarding what they are part of in SSC and IUCN.

Whatever its implications for you as a Specialist Group Chair or stand-alone RLA Focal Point, the Steering Committee and I look forward to working with you as a co-leader of this important change. We truly want to bring a better designed SSC to our network members, to IUCN, and to the important biodiversity goals that bring us together as an expert network. We also look forward to refining our developing plans with you during our Chairs meeting next February in the Emirates.

With respect and gratitude for your contributions,

Holly T. Dublin

Chair
IUCN Species Survival Commission (2005-2008)

THE IUCN SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION: DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

An Overview for SSC Chairs and stand-alone Red List Focal Points

The following are some of the initial questions that you may have about the planned SSC “Design for the Future”, along with the Steering Committee’s best current answers. The basic structure decisions have been approved by the SSC Chair and Steering Committee, but the details related to implementation will evolve with input from stakeholders, including SSC Specialist Group Chairs and stand-alone Red List Authority focal points. Hopefully, you as a Specialist Group Chair or stand-alone Red List Authority focal point will help refine many details of implementation – including how to communicate, manage and support the changes. The Steering Committee hopes that you will help test and refine details related to successfully implementing the new design so that SSC can achieve the synergies that bring the world’s biodiversity experts together for common cause.

Q1. *Why is SSC Re-designing itself?*

A1. SSC is redesigning ...

- to respond to the increased global and local importance, visibility, scope and opportunities related to both assessment and conservation work
 - because of the reputational risks of not protecting the independence and objectivity of the Red List process
 - to make it easier for SSC volunteers and groups to work with other IUCN groups and with partner organizations to achieve significant conservation impact
 - to improve coordination of and enhance support for the Network
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Q2. *What are the salient features of the redesign?*

A2. The new design...

- clearly separates SSC’s assessment activities from conservation work
 - streamlines the number of Red List Authorities, focusing them at a high taxonomic level and clarifying Red List roles, relationships and process
 - separates Red List evaluation from assessment (ensures peer review process)
 - provides a clear mandate and focus for Specialist Groups to engage exclusively in conservation work – analysing and mitigating threats
 - clarifies Species Survival Commission and Species Programme roles
 - clarifies the relationship between SSC and its donors/partners
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Q3. What is the SSC trying to achieve with the new design?

A3. Through the redesign, SSC intends to...

- provide the world's leading biodiversity experts with clearer role opportunities within SSC
- safeguard its scientific reputation
- maintain its leadership and positioning in global conservation: anticipate and take charge of its future
- improve understanding and enhance the importance of its role within IUCN
- better align and achieve synergies among the world's species and biodiversity conservation experts with IUCN's "One Programme" approach

Q4. What does the new design look like and what are the specific roles?

A4. The new design contains two major kinds of operating groups: Assessment Groups and Specialist Groups (see Figure 1). An individual may be a member of one or both groups, but the groups are distinct, performing one or the other, not both kinds of activities. The Groups have equal status within the SSC.

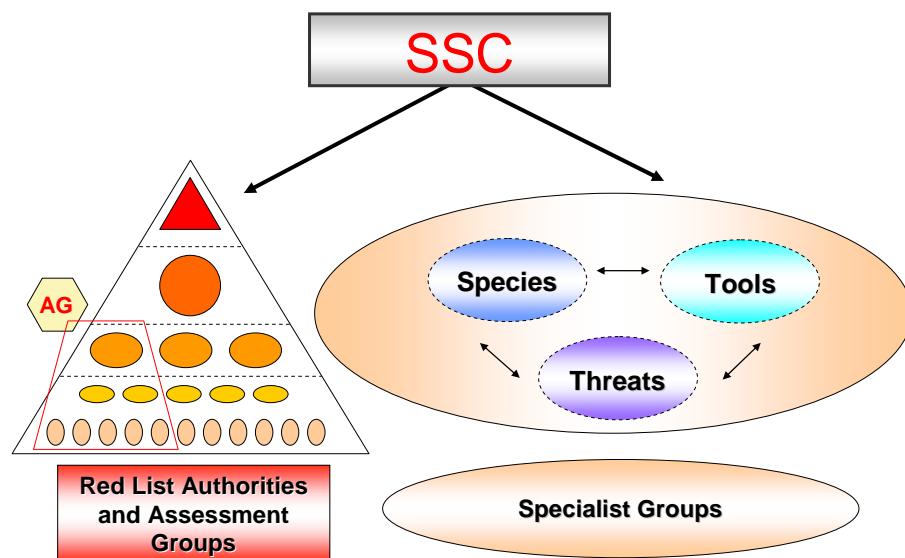


Figure 1. Design for the future: the overall structure of the Species Survival Commission

Here are the key changes or refinements related to *Assessment Groups and their activities* in the new structure¹:

- Assessment Groups sit within a *streamlined* number of Red List Authorities (see Figure 2), focused at a high taxonomic level and clearly reporting within the SSC/IUCN structure
 - Although the exact number of Red List Authorities is not yet defined, fewer (perhaps 10-15) RLA's will eventually replace the current 74.
 - RLA's are established by and accountable to the SSC Chair, with training and advisory support as needed from the Species Programme
 - as and when possible, RLA's will have a paid (full or part time) Coordinator who integrates activities and ensures consistency across the Assessment Groups within the RLA
 - Assessment Groups, led by an Assessment Group Chair, focus on specific taxa.
 - Assessment Groups consist of Evaluators and Assessors, drawing on input from Data Providers.
 - An individual may perform both Evaluator and Assessor roles, but may not evaluate his/her own assessments.
- The streamlined RLA's may take time to develop and individual RLA's may evolve on different timetables.
- During the early phases of implementation, the Coordinator role may be filled by an Assessment Group Chair or even an Evaluator.

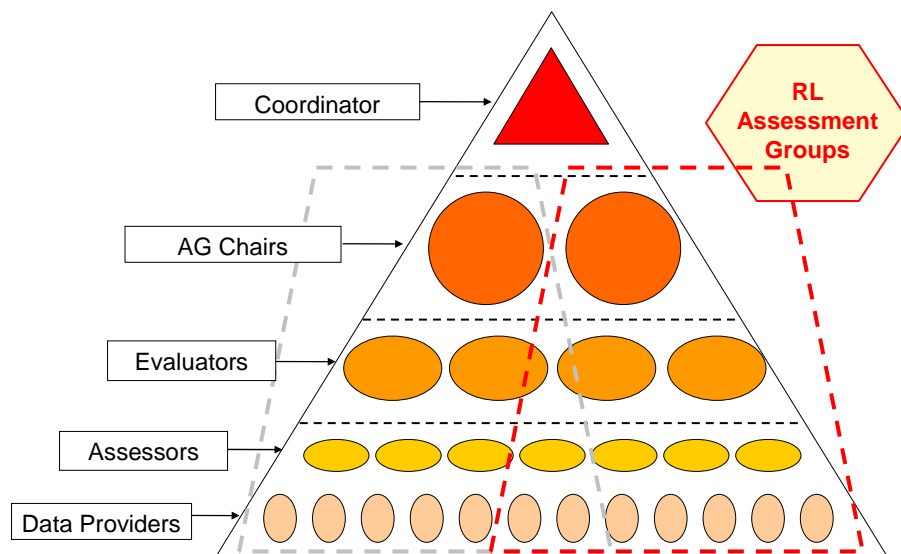


Figure 2. The structure of SSC Red List Authorities

¹ For more detailed role, establishment, and operations descriptions of the RLA's and their component parts, see Annex A, pp. 19 – 23 and 27 in the report, *The IUCN Species Survival Commission: Design for the Future*.

Here are the key changes and refinements related to *Specialist Groups and activities*².

- Specialist Groups focus exclusively on conservation work – analysing and mitigating threats. They have no assessment/Red List roles.
- The Specialist Group’s role is to identify threats, provide tools, and assist species/biodiversity conservation on the ground.
- Specialist Groups will contribute to capacity building in their respective fields as and where possible.
- Specialist Groups will focus their efforts on collective action, bringing their expertise together to deliver conservation solutions more effectively and more powerfully than they could as individuals or through their host institutions acting alone.
- Specialist Groups have expanded and more streamlined connections for action with Regions, Commissions, and other thematic groups within IUCN.
- Specialist Group members may work with other IUCN groups to develop project proposals. These proposals may include provisions to pay for SG member time on the projects.
- Whether compensated as part of a paid project, or not, conservation work undertaken by a Specialist Group is done in the name of the respective Group, not the member or his/her institution.

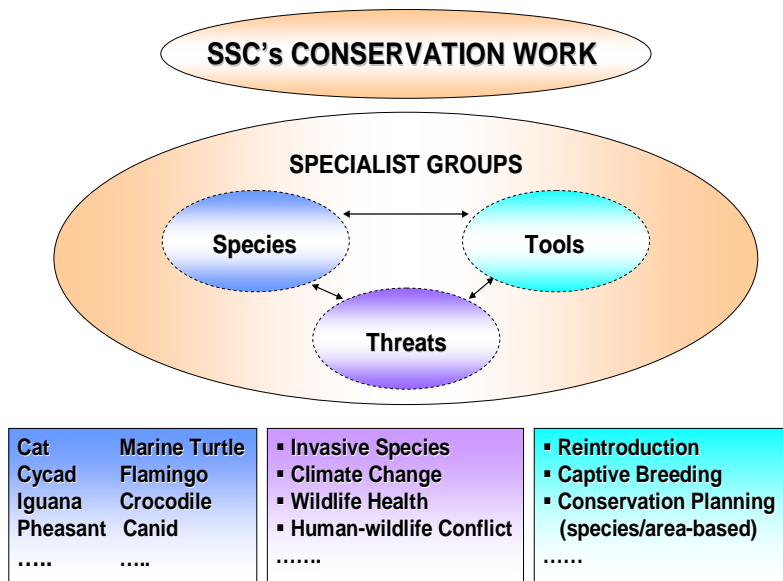


Figure 3. SSC’s conservation work: the focus of Specialist Groups

² For more detailed role, establishment, and operations descriptions related to Specialist Groups, see Annex A, pp. 25, 26 and 28 in the report, *The IUCN Species Survival Commission: Design for the Future*.

Q5. What role does the **Species Programme** play in the new design?

A5. The Species Programme helps Assessment Groups and Specialist Groups³.

Related to Assessment Groups, the Species Programme....

- performs quality and consistency checks, but does not redo evaluations or assessments. The SP returns assessments that don't meet standards to the RLA or to those submitting assessments from outside the SSC network
- provides training and mentorship in assessment and evaluation
- produces and publicizes the Red List and Red List publications
- manages the SIS

Related to Specialist Groups, the Species Programme....

- provides fund raising support
- registers SG members in IUCN Commission Registration system
- supports communication and networking
- helps to disseminate strategic planning guidelines
- facilitates links with other parts of IUCN as requested by the SSC Chair's office.

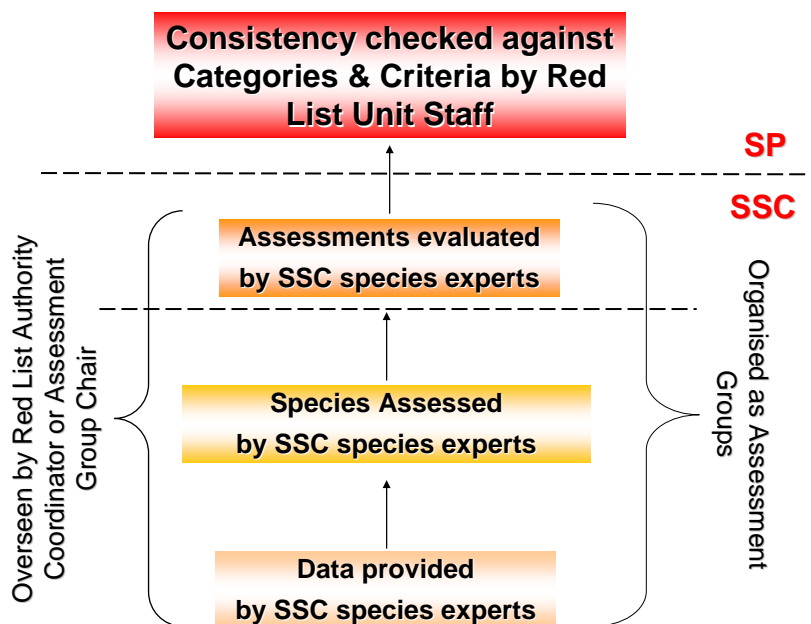


Figure 4. The flow of the Red List process

³ For more detailed role, establishment, and operations descriptions of the Species Programme in the new design, see pp. 13 and 29/30 (in Annex B) of the report, *The IUCN Species Survival Commission: Design for the Future*.

Q6. What is the role of the **SSC Chair and the Chair's Office**?

A6. The role of the SSC Chair and the Chair's Office includes the following for Assessment Groups and for Specialist Groups:

Related to Assessment Groups, the Chair's Office ...

- appoints Red List Coordinators, and in the absence of Coordinators, appoints Red List Team Leaders
- appoints the Chairs of the Biodiversity Assessment and of the Biodiversity Indicators Sub-Committees
- provides assistance in taking issues or problems with the Red List process or Categories and Criteria to the appropriate higher level
- ensures that the Biodiversity Assessment Sub-Committee of the SSC is performing its necessary functions
- provides assistance when there are issues regarding the leadership of the group (e.g. resignations, complaints, etc.)

Related to Specialist Groups, the Chair's Office ...

- appoints Chairs
- provides assistance where the Specialist Group wants to escalate an issue to a higher level in IUCN or to a Government.
- provides input and assistance on policy matters
- provides input and advice on the strategic direction of Specialist Groups
- assists when there are issues regarding the leadership of the group (e.g. resignations, complaints, internal conflict, etc.)

Q7. Are there any **other changes** related to the new structure?

A7. SSC is treating the restructuring of the network as a change process. This means:

- the Chair and Steering Committee are also looking at needed changes in internal processes (planning, communication, recognition, training, tools, the structure of the Steering Committee and Sub-Committees, the Chair's role).
- the Species Programme is aligning to support the Network in this change.
- we are requesting relevant changes in support and relationships from other parts of IUCN⁴. For example, the Chair has ramped up conversations with Regional Directors, other Commissions, and thematic programme Heads (e.g. forest, marine, protected areas, business and biodiversity, etc.) regarding opportunities for more collaborative work in future.

⁴ For more details on IUCN's roles in support of SSC and mutual success, see pp. 13 and 30/31 (in Annex B) of the report, *The IUCN Species Survival Commission: Design for the Future*.

- SSC Chairs and stand-alone Red List Focal Points are requested to help us evolve the new design and prepare to implement it for the new 2009 - 2012 quadrennium, when the redesign will officially be launched.

Q8. How does all this fit within the larger IUCN?

A8. IUCN's One Programme initiative is intended to better capitalize on IUCN's diversity, reach, capabilities, and resources, including its: convening and facilitating role; international policy positioning; global reach via members; Governments; NGO's; regional and thematic programmes; staff capabilities; and its roughly 10,000 volunteers in six Commissions.

- Clearly, the expertise within the SSC is a core competency for IUCN as reinforced by the recent survey of IUCN's Members.
- One broad goal of the new SSC design is to better leverage this biodiversity competence into all of IUCN's influence and delivery mechanisms.
- Figure 5 below shows the major connections that SSC's design creates or reconfirms:

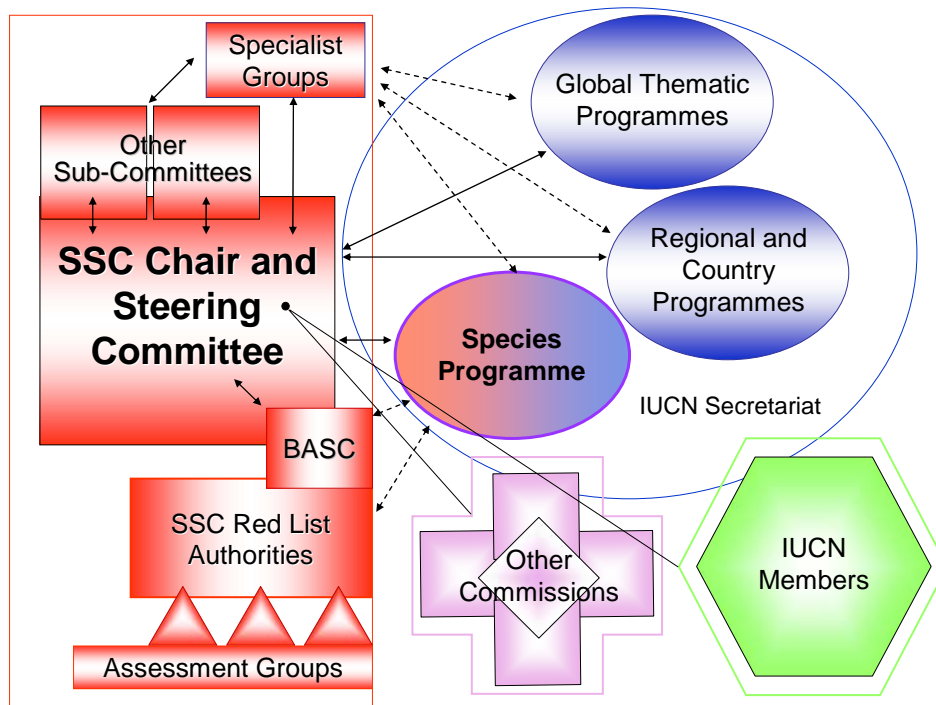


Figure 5. The relationship of SSC to other parts of IUCN

Q9. Does this mean that Groups will have more resources?

A9. As everyone knows, the funding challenges are great. They constrain SSC and the Species Programme's ability to provide the support we all know is necessary. However, the resourcing difficulties are part of the reason for the SSC redesign. The restructuring should make it easier to position us for more funding and support.

- First, the restructuring packages our Red List activities and contributions more succinctly, making it easier for donors to support those activities and be part of more rapidly bringing valid species data into decision-making at all levels.
- Second, by more clearly aligning with IUCN's One Programme agenda, we will be positioned to make a more coherent funding case to the Secretariat and to the Council for core funding.
- Third, we anticipate more opportunities for funded projects because of our closer programme/project connections with Regions, other thematic programmes and other Commissions.

It won't be easy, but if everyone works together to make the funding case for each of the above opportunities, we anticipate breakthroughs in this often frustrating, but important area. At the same time, IUCN is seriously exploring its funding model for the future. Our Commission, as the heartland of IUCN, is well positioned for new funding models but we must help create them.

Q10. What does this mean for SSC members?

A10. Within the new organization structure members and potential members:

- have clearer and more focused opportunities
- have the ability to contribute actively to more powerful collective action and to higher level outputs, outcomes and impacts. They...
 - can choose to focus on species assessments and building the Red List, thus contributing to the most important species database in the world. The more streamlined and better coordinated Red List structure will be easier for members to navigate. The better role differentiation within the RLA's will also make it easier for SSC to know who is doing what and to acknowledge and support their contributions
 - may choose to put their species and biodiversity knowledge into action on the ground. By being part of a Specialist Group, they can work to analyse and mitigate threats, provide planning and action tools, draft and help to implement strategies to conserve specific species
- have better connections, via collaborations with other IUCN groups, to regional and local project and programme activity – the Chairs' Meeting providing the first such opportunity for exploring future synergies
- have clearer and more visible (but chosen) accountabilities – so the new structure does emphasize delivering on the commitments they choose to make. But the

new structure also makes it more likely that their volunteer contributions and collaborations will bear fruit – via the Red List or through conservation action

Network members who want to do both Red List assessment AND conservation work will also be free to contribute to both kinds of groups

Q11. What does this mean for **Specialist Group Chairs?**

A11. Chairs are a key part of the SSC leadership team and will hopefully be very important allies as we refine and implement our redesigned SSC for the future. At this time in SSC's evolution, Chairs are SSC's primary links to the Commission's 7,000+ volunteers. There are five major implications for you as a Chair:

1. Take some time to understand the new design and its rationale – hopefully you will see it as a good change at this point in our evolution. Read the full design report, *The IUCN Species Survival Commission: Design for the Future*. You will find it on the Chairs' Meeting website:
http://www.iucn.org/themes/ssc/for_members/chair_meeting_2008/meeting_docs.htm
2. Think about the possible direction your Specialist Group may take when the design is launched after the next World Conservation Congress in Barcelona (October 2008). Will your Group focus primarily on Red List assessments? Then you will probably become an Assessment Group nested within an RLA. But your focus will be on contributing to SSC priorities for assessments within your taxonomic area. Is your Group's primary work related to conservation action? Then you will probably remain or become a Specialist Group. Does your group focus heavily in both areas? Then you and your Group will need to take a decision on one side or the other (assessment or conservation), migrating the other work to another Group under another Chair.
3. Take some time now, and during the Chairs' Meeting, to decide how to evolve your SSC affiliation after Barcelona. The next few months provide a good opportunity to redirect or confirm your own personal passions and synergies and to explore how these might best fit within SSC. There will be time and opportunity for further discussion and shaping as we work together to refine our plans and manage this change. Also, our February 2008 Chairs' Meeting will be a great opportunity to explore ideas and implications.
4. If you would like to ask any major questions and/or make comments and recommendations for refinement and implementation of the redesign, please send an email to sscchairoffice@iucn.org. We will do our best to use this information to help us shape some of the work we will do next February at the Chairs' Meeting in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi (UAE).
5. Think about yourself as a partner in change with the Chair and the Steering Committee of the SSC as we refine and implement this "Design for the Future" in the next Quadrennium.

Q12. What if my SG does not fit into either the Assessment or Specialist Group category?

A12. Some groups will only continue to be part of SSC if they are working on priority assessments. Think about the new design. The Biodiversity Assessment Sub-Committee (BASC) will continue to advise the SSC Steering Committee on what SSC's assessment priorities should be, but we will draw on input from SSC members to future plans. In the next Quadrennium Assessment Groups will focus on SSC's priorities for assessment.

Conservation Specialist Groups will work more closely with SSC Steering Committee and Chair and other parts of IUCN to define priority impact areas and mutually commit to plans. The fact is that SSC and IUCN have limited support resources. We are finally recognizing that we can't support and integrate everything that groups want to do. SSC sees our future relationship with SGs as a relationship of mutual purpose and partnership. SG Chairs and members will be part of our larger and collective impact. We will work together to define what that is and how we will support each other in building cooperation and enhancing synergies, while still encouraging and retaining the creativity and passion that is our hallmark. Achieving this balance will be a key goal of the SSC Chair, and hopefully, for all of us.

Concluding Remarks from the Chair of the SSC

SSC is redesigning itself for the future. We are the heartland of IUCN, an organization that has a diversity of characteristics unlike any other. In addition to our unique membership, global presence and volunteer Commissions, IUCN has the ability to: guide government policy through the provision of sound, science-based information; convene and facilitate decision-making processes; provide objective and high quality technical advice; contribute credibly to important processes through our many novel capacities, including our own Red List of Threatened Species™, observer status in the UN General Assembly and MORE!)

You, the leaders of the SSC, are a key part of the IUCN story. Your work, passion, outreach, and willingness to devote your time and expertise to SSC are highly valued and have brought us this far. It is both exciting and difficult to say to you, “we must regroup, refocus ourselves and redouble our efforts”. Change is always hard for personal, group, and organisational trajectories and methods need to be polished, changed, appreciated AND supported for the future.

As your “Chair of Chairs”, I am asking you to work with me to help create the SSC of the future. It will be an SSC that truly synergizes the amazing talents of the species and conservation experts you recruit. It will be an SSC that optimises the access, resources and opportunities provided by IUCN. It will be an SSC that makes a real difference in a world that needs our collective capabilities – focused, energised, and amplified by the SSC design that we are putting in place and that you will help refine and implement.

Let’s work together to bring about this change process. I see us as partners in amplifying the expertise and impact of our network. With the support of the SSC Steering Committee, I am committed to managing it positively and to listening to your ideas about how to accomplish this. We will have opportunities to work together at the Chairs’ Meeting in Al Ain in February.

Until then, many thanks for all you have done and will do for our collective purpose.

Holly T. Dublin

Chair
IUCN Species Survival Commission (2005-2008)