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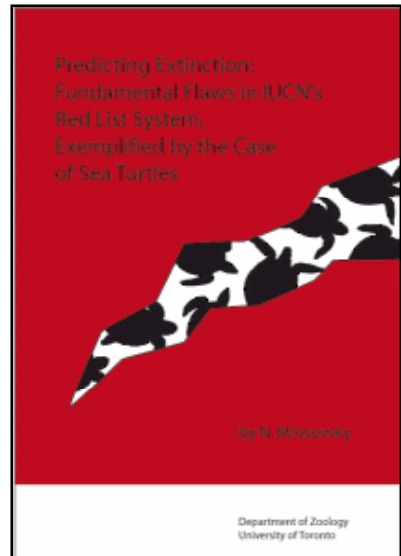
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Predicting Extinction: Fundamental Flaws in IUCN's Red List System, Exemplified by the Case of Sea Turtles

By Nicholas Mrosovsky
A Review by Jaques Berney

This is a 70 page booklet by an expert in sea turtles, a professor at the University of Toronto, Canada. It may be considered a scientifically based and properly documented pamphlet that describes how the Red List System, elaborated by the IUCN – World Conservation Union, and its applications, are flawed, especially in difficult cases, such as sea turtles.

The work starts with a presentation of the history of changes in definitions and categories for Red Lists. It notes the misuse of the precautionary principle, which is implemented to classify species rather than to take conservation action, especially for species for which the data available are deficient. Thus species that may number hundreds of thousands of individuals may be found in the same category of Critically endangered as species numbering only 100 or a few hundreds of specimens. Precaution is used instead of evidence.



In This Issue

Predicting Extinction: Fundamental Flaws in IUCN's Red List System A Review by Jaques Berney	Page 1
When Power Issues and Conservation Issues Clash.....	Page 3
Seal Hunt Objectives nearly met.....	Page 4
When Politicians manage Fisheries Fish, Fishermen and Consumers Lose	Page 5

All is not Fair in the Animal Rights War ..	Page 6
Thousands of Elephants May be Killed By Steve Mitchell	Page 7
Nunavut - Still the People of the Seal	Page 8
The Forum at IWMC.org	Page 9
Subscriptions / Submissions	Page 9

The IUCN's criteria are based on one system for all species without distinction, e.g. between long-lived and short-lived species or widespread species and species occurring in one location only. This may result in serious inconsistencies and may be misleading, in one direction or the other. Although this is, as noted by the author, recognized in the guidelines for the use of the categories and criteria, which say "although this appears illogical, it is the result of the structure of the criteria", long-lived and widespread species continue to be listed in the category of species supposed to become extinct in the near future even when subpopulations are stable or increasing.



A relatively long section is then devoted to the diverse interpretations used for a standard system. A first problem highlighted is the role of the many IUCN Specialist Groups involved in the process, whose views may be almost opposite in terms of conservation. Specific examples are used for the hawksbill turtle and crocodiles to present the perceptions of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group and the Crocodile Specialist Group respectively. Regarding the former, and with reference to the green turtle and the special treatment (an exception) granted to its Mediterranean population, the author underlines the tendency to make bad news overwhelm good news. Further, regarding the leatherback turtle, another long-lived and widespread species, the author eloquently illustrates the debatable validity of a system that uses inconsistent data from different periods and places to assess the evolution of populations of a species.

Another described problem is the supremacy of the criteria over common sense. Thus, although the Marine Turtle Specialist Group did not consider that the hawksbill turtle was expected to become extinct in the foreseeable future, the species was maintained in the Critically Endangered (with extinction)

category, because it was meeting the relevant criteria. Citing Messel (1988), the author believes that the "real goal is to evaluate the risk of extinction, not just to apply the key wherever it may lead".

A more qualitative approach in the implementation of the criteria is recommended, since the IUCN itself recognizes that the criteria were "developed through wide consultation, and they are set at what are generally judged to be appropriate levels, even if no formal justification for these values exists". Therefore the criteria should not be considered as absolute, and should not be implemented as such.

The categorization of species in the Red Lists may be subject to appeals, which are handled by a Standards and Petitions Subcommittee. Although IUCN now states that "all assessments should be documented" and the S&PS has ruled in the same way, this alleged transparency appears to the author to be contradicted by the fact that the membership of the S&PS remains secret. The case of the olive ridley turtle is used to illustrate the application of 'secret science' to justify decisions that are contradicted by published data.

After having recapitulated the problems and questioned whether the constantly changing IUCN system of red listing has improved, N. Mrosovsky expresses the need for a more fundamental change, notably, of the people involved, especially for sea turtles. If the IUCN Red Lists are rather well known, their deficiencies are generally unknown. Unfortunately, no better system exists, at least for the time being. Another aspect that is noted, but that is not attributed to IUCN, is that the criteria for categorization are used to push for the prohibition of any exploitation of or trade in species belonging to certain categories rather than to promote actual conservation actions.

The author concludes his work by asking whether there is a future for IUCN's Red Lists. His answer is yes, on the conditions that the listings of sea turtles be reconsidered, that a better use of the category of Data Deficient species be made until the status of such species would become better known on the basis of scientific evidence, and that the criteria be revised, once again and in particular for long-lived and widespread species, for which emphasis should be put on the state of sub-populations. Acting in such a way would constitute an opportunity for IUCN, which has accomplished much, to enhance its credibility, and to attract the support it needs for its great enterprises. If

not, the opportunity would be for another organization to step in with a better system.

Reading of this booklet is highly recommended to all those interested in conservation, and should guide them to consult the Red Lists with caution so they shall not be granted an absolute value they do not deserve. Predicting Extinction is available at:

<http://members.seaturtle.org/mrosovsky>
(ISBN 0-9734777-0-9)

A limited number of hard copies are available from the author at the Dept of Zoology, University of Toronto, Canada.

When Power Issues and Conservation Issues Clash The Caribou are in the middle of the Problem

An unfortunate incident has occurred in Labrador. Though Labrador is an integral part of the province of Newfoundland, it is located on the mainland near Quebec, in eastern Canada. An endangered herd of caribou exists there, known as the Red Wine herd. The area in which it occurs has been declared off limits to hunting by the provincial Department of Natural Resources, in order that this herd may be allowed to regain population strength. Quebec Innu have disagreed with this provincial order, and have registered this disagreement by illegally hunting these animals.

In March, because of this breach of provincial law, officers confiscated caribou carcasses and a number of guns. In protest of this action, Innu hunters from Quebec came into the area of the Red Wine herd, and again, slaughtered over thirty of these animals, leaving some in defiance of the law, and taking some back home with them. They did

so at a time when the provincial conservation officers were off work, due to a strike over a labor dispute. Therefore, the herd, which was thought to have numbered around 100 animals, has been cut down by first, some 34, and then in protest, over 30 more.

The action is not universally supported by other Innu people in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in Quebec. The concept of necessity of conservation of the herd by prohibition of hunting is a cultural pattern widely accepted by non-native inhabitants.

Some native people apparently also support such an action. After the confiscation of guns and animals by conservation officials, Innu demanded a meeting with the premier of Newfoundland, and are offended that such a meeting has not yet taken place. Their second illegal hunting action is a direct statement by them of their dissatisfaction with this situation of power over the land and the game and those who use it.

This culture clash hurts Innu, in that their aboriginal rights to hunt may be further curtailed through legal actions taken due to these incidents. It has become a case of power defined and refuted, and redefined, so that the chances of negotiation are lessened.



The Red Wine caribou herd has lost some sixty percent of its numbers, but reports are that they may be mingling with another herd nearby. The natural world is never static, and

the boundaries made by men are often disputed. No cultural group has a lock on the moral high ground in all cases, and the priorities of conservation versus aboriginal rights to hunt are not soon to be resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

IWMC regrets this situation as much as do the people of Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and we urge all participants to meet as respectful equals in resolving the several disputes that have evidently been going on out in the bush.

Seal Hunt Objectives nearly met No Lull in the Cull

The goal of Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans for this year's harp seal fishery was to realize a harvest of 350,000 animals. Gulf of St. Lawrence fishermen did their part by killing some 90,000 of the animals by the end of March, and Newfoundland fishermen in their longliners have nearly completed the job, taking over 200,000 animals in two days. Reports of approximately 500 boats off the front are apparently the reason why the two-day span was enough to complete their share of the take. Now, the rest of the quota may be taken by fishermen in small "speedboats", outboards that race out to the ice from shore, take what they can bring back, and then, riding low, fight the swells and the winds to get safely back to port. Longliner fishermen are now trucking their pelts, meat and fat to market, and anticipating debt relief from their long and income-less winter.

The seal herd is now estimated at over 5.2 million animals. This huge and unnatural state of affairs was caused by the interruption in

harvest orchestrated by the IFAW. In 1982 IFAW launched a petition drive in the EU, and the parliament passed a law banning the import of the products of seals under the age of one year. Since that time, the herd was not significantly affected by hunting until the last few years. Now markets in Eastern Europe, China and some other areas, have increased due to a desire for both pelts and for the oil, which is high in Omega 3s and which is now a very popular food supplement.

This increased market demand has fortunately coincided with a huge supply of seals and with the desire of Canada's East Coast fishermen to gather them up for a long awaited supplement to their fish-dependent income. The government boats and planes were busy off the front, so that law enforcement and coast guard could keep an eye on sealers, monitoring the hunt and hoping there would be no need for rescues, as the seas were extremely rough, with high winds and in some areas, heavy fog.

The boys are now safely back home. The hunt critics are still carrying on about barbarism, and concerns that the quota is unsustainable. Of course it is. That is the whole point. Protest in the '80s destroyed the market, and seals grew out of balance with their world. That is being corrected now. Another year or two, and the herd may be cut down to a size appropriate to the ecosystem in today's Atlantic. Then the quotas will drop to the more moderate harvest levels that sustained the herd at a slowly growing biomass twenty years ago. Good job, Canada. Congratulations, and here's to many more! At long last, a government and its citizens are correcting a great wrong.

When Politicians manage Fisheries, Fish, Fishermen and Consumers Lose

Nils Stolpe, director of communications for the Garden State Seafood Association, works for commercial striped bass fishermen. Therefore, one might expect his opinions on the open areas in which recreational and commercial fishermen are allowed to fish for this species, might be tainted in favor of the commercial sector. However, his arguments concern comparative figures for striped bass mortality from two different causes, and after assessing them, one has to agree that there is something wrong with the fishery management rules in this case.

Stolpe argues for opening the EEZ to commercial striped bass fishing, and for recreational anglers to have the right to keep any such fish that they take in the EEZ, also. His reasons are the following: At this time, recreational striped bass fishers who catch the species in the EEZ, must release them. The mortality from this catch and release practice is inordinately high, compared to the mortality from the striped bass by-catch that goes on in the same area in the commercial fishery. However, Stolpe argues that the fish are wasted, nevertheless, and that both the multi-species fishery and the recreational fishers should be allowed to keep certain quotas of bass caught between 3 and 200 miles off the New Jersey shore.

Within 3 miles from shore, it is legal for either recreational or commercial fishers to take striped bass, and to keep them. From 3 miles out to the 200-mile limit of the US EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone), all striped bass taken must be discarded, whether they are caught intentionally by recreational fishermen, or as by-catch by commercial fishers.



The House Resources Committee has a subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans. A hearing was recently held in order to gather explicit information on striped bass management factors, problems, and statistics. The commercial fishermen requested that the EEZ be opened to striped bass take, in order to cut down on waste of the resource, but the New Jersey Congressmen present apparently ignored the mortality statistics and demanded that the EEZ remain closed to a quota. Stolpe has stated that it appears the New Jersey politicians are more influenced by the recreational fishermen in their districts and by the "misinformation" given by the Pew Oceana people, than they are by the NMFS stats on the striped bass fishery, including mortality figures coming out of both segments of the fishery.

This is a disheartening picture, because IWMC and many of our colleagues firmly believe that management decisions should always be made on the basis of the best scientific information available, and with the needs of all users of the resource in mind. It is obvious that the striped bass resource could be more efficiently managed and that if the

EEZ were open to both commercial and recreational bass fishers, wasteful mortality including the by-catch figures, would be reduced. We wish the two segments of the fishery could get together on this for the sake of conservation of the striped bass resource in the waters off New Jersey.

All is not Fair in the Animal Rights War

Ask any mainstream animal rights/environmentalist group leader what, in his or her opinion, is the greatest threat to the on-going success of this tightly networked movement, and you will hear a surprising answer: "Extremism". Mainstream animal rights and environmentalist NGOs are always wary of the bizarre antics of PETA and of PETA's surrogates and field troops, the ALF and the ELF thugs who burn, bomb, and terrify the rest of society. They know that the "animal rights" and "environmentalist" labels, which they themselves bear, are diminished by the extreme acts of these extremist colleagues.



PETA's antics in the past year have included accosting children whose mothers wear fur coats, while parents and children attend theaters and public events. These direct confrontations make the rest of the movement quite uncomfortable.

More recently, PETA billboards in western Canada have deeply offended people whose female relatives have disappeared and are presumed to have been murdered by a pig farmer. This person is alleged to have dismembered dozens of women and may have

mixed their remains in with the pork products of his farm. PETA billboards show a pig and a woman and the words, "Neither of us is food". On April 8, an editorial in The Globe and Mail covered this distasteful matter, and discussed the utter disregard that PETA's leaders appear to have for the feelings of those people whose relatives are thus missing. The Globe and Mail editorial states that "PETA clearly wants to use the outrage over the Pickton case as a mirror for what it sees as society's hypocrisy: that people are horrified by women being killed, but not by pigs being killed."

Clearly, PETA thrives on being the extremist organization that people love to hate. IWMC repeats our opinion that the US government must take steps to seriously review the charitable status of this organization, which uses its tax exempt donations to commit these offensive atrocities as well as to actively support the illegal acts of ALF and ELF in both countries.

No society should have to be subjected to the public, egregious behavior of this anti-human, scofflaw group of opportunists.

Thousands of Elephants May be Killed

By Steve Mitchell

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PORT ELIZABETH, South Africa, April 14 (UPI) -- The African elephant still is endangered across most of the continent, but conservation efforts in South Africa have been so successful game reserves there soon may be faced with killing thousands of the animals to keep the herds from overpopulating.



Although the African elephant population numbered 5 million to 10 million in 1930, there now are less than 500,000 of the animals. South Africa, however, has seen rapid increases in recent years in the elephant herds found throughout the country on more than 20 national parks and private reserves.

The populations are growing so large Addo Elephant National Park is expanding and private game reserves are using contraceptive vaccines to keep their populations from growing beyond capacity.

The vaccine has drawbacks, however, and can be difficult, if not impossible, to administer in larger herds so the populations may keep growing until the reserves are forced to slaughter thousands of the animals.

"It's inevitable that large parks will have to cull thousands," Johan Joubert, director of wildlife at Shamwari Game Reserve, located

just north of Port Elizabeth, told United Press International.

The reason is that overcrowding leads to increased aggression as well as destruction of habitat.

"We're seeing a disaster in countries like Botswana," where overpopulation led to elephants destroying vegetation that can take hundreds of years to regenerate, Joubert said.

Anban Padayachee, senior section ranger at nearby Addo National Elephant Park, said he sees the same thing among his elephant population.

"We're seeing aggressive levels rising merely due to overcrowding," Padayachee said. The animals also are devastating swatches of land, he added.

Currently, killing elephants in South Africa is banned because of international pressures but Joubert and Padayachee said it would be wise to reverse the ban because if the growing elephant population is not addressed soon, the reserves will have to kill even more animals.

"Culling is the saddest thing because you can't cull just one elephant, you have to cull the whole family," said Conrad Enslin, a game ranger at Shamwari.

The reason is elephants are very social animals with close-knit family structures, Joubert said. They will mourn and nurse their dead, so it is easier on the herds to take out an entire family unit rather than an individual, he said. "It's quite sad to do it," he added.

A contraceptive vaccine exists but requires two doses given two weeks apart. This means animals must be identified and relocated to ensure the second dose is given to the same elephant, Joubert said. This can be an effective strategy in the smaller herds but for larger herds it is nearly impossible to accurately identify individual elephants and track them so they can be located for a second dose.

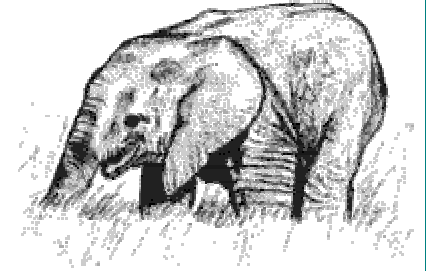
The vaccine, therefore, probably will not be a useful tool for keeping the populations in check, he said.

Padayachee said the vaccine also causes increased aggression among males toward the females because the bulls get frustrated their repeated mating efforts are unsuccessful.

He said there should be a governing body that private reserves could approach to get approval to cull select numbers of elephants.

That might help change public perception that culling is something to be avoided at all costs, he added.

He said when Kruger National Park recently was forced to cull some of its elephants, every part of the animal, from the tusks to the hide, was utilized, so it was not a wasteful act and helped the existing herds in the long-run.



In addition, there are so many elephants now the gene pool is large enough that culling is not a threat to the conservation of the species, he said.

Steve Mitchell is UPI's Medical Correspondent. He has been on assignment in South Africa. E-mail sciencemail@upi.com

Nunavut - Still the People of the Seal

When the Canadian harp seal harvest was brought to a temporary halt by animal rights protest in the 1980s, an entirely separate group of people suffered immensely as a result. Canadian Inuit people who depend on the ring seal for subsistence, also suffered because their market for ring seal pelts collapsed when European buyers, spooked by the protest movement and by the ban on immature seal imports, also stopped buying ring seal pelts.

This meant that the Inuit cycle of seal hunting with guns and gasoline driven boats was broken, because they suddenly had no income with which to continue to go out and hunt.

They could no longer afford to get to their resource, and their suffering was the result of nutritional and cultural deprivation, a side effect of the animal rights protest against the killing of whitecoat harp pups.

Today, there has been a gradual recovery in Nunavut, as well as in southern Canada. Seal products can once again be sold on the international market. Families can once more depend on their men to bring in seal meat, "the best food in the world". Ring seals were never endangered by any level of hunting. This is a subsistence activity that is directly connected to the irrelevant vagaries of the global marketplace.

An Inuit man today can go out and shoot his seals, by himself, rather than having to crouch by a breathing hole for hours with a hand held spear. Surely, this may be a better death for the seals, as it may be quicker. He can use a snowmobile, rather than depend on a dog team, and the meat he obtains can be used to feed the family, whereas formerly, much of it sustained his dog team. Now, his efforts bring home food, and the pelts can be sold for cash, which he uses to buy more fuel, more ammunition, and to keep his engines maintained. Life is different now



in the High North. It isn't necessarily easier, and the interactions of men, fish, seals, whales, and caribou are still all relevant to survival.

Today's people of the seal are proud of building their lives in Nunavut, Canada's newest territory. They are very independent, and very proud.

The ring seal is still a constant, still a vitally important part of the new life. IWMC congratulates the people of the seal for sticking to their principles, and for surviving in these times of politics and globalization.

The Forum at IWMC.org

Please visit our FORUM Section at www.iwmc.org/IWMC-Forum for the complete articles.

Antidotes for Antis

by James A. Swan

Being a victim of "animal rightists" is no fun; but to win the battle for hunting, get the law on your side, be creative and have some fun.

Bye - Bye Birdie

by James A. Beers

The FWS Migratory Bird program is in disarray and crumbling before your eyes.

Better Mountain Lion Management Needed

Morgan Hill Times Editorial

Tuesday - March 30, 2004

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