



COMMITTEE ON THE
STATUS OF ENDANGERED
WILDLIFE IN CANADA

COMITÉ SUR LA SITUATION
DES ESPÈCES EN PÉRIL
AU CANADA

Peregrine Falcon and Sea Otter No Longer Threatened with Extinction

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) met at the Station écotouristique Duchesnay near Quebec City, Quebec, April 23-27, 2007 where the conservation status of 48 species was assessed.

Recovery Efforts Succeed

The Sea Otter was wiped out in British Columbia by the fur trade in the 1700s and 1800s. It was re-introduced in 1969, when otters were brought to the northwest coast of Vancouver Island from Alaska. Sea Otters have now re-populated a third of their historic range in British Columbia. Numbers are still small, but the population is growing and expanding.

Peregrine Falcons declined drastically in the 1950s and 1960s because of pesticide contamination that thinned their eggshells. After the pesticide DDT was banned in North America, re-introduction programs helped speed the recovery of populations in southern Canada. All three subspecies of the Peregrine Falcon in Canada were assessed and none are threatened.

“It is very satisfying to witness the successful recovery of species that were on the edge of extinction, such as the Peregrine Falcon and Sea Otter. It highlights the importance of endangered species legislation and associated recovery programs in protecting and recovering Canada’s wildlife.” said Jeff Hutchings, chair of COSEWIC.

Big Shark in Deep Trouble

Despite these successes, many species are still considered to be at risk of extinction in Canada. Species from all regions of the country from terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems are at risk of extinction.

The Pacific population of the Basking Shark, the largest fish in Canadian waters, was assessed as Endangered. Feeding on tiny plankton, it grows up to 12m in length – nearly the length of a city bus. This species is particularly susceptible to population declines because it takes up to 18 years to reach maturity and females are pregnant for up to 3.5 years, the longest of any animal. Populations on the BC coast have plummeted and only 6 individuals have been seen in BC waters since 1996. An eradication program was

directed at these harmless sharks until 1970, in an attempt to protect the nets used in the commercial salmon fishery.

Bird Declines Unexplained

COSEWIC expressed alarm that aerial-feeding, insect-eating birds are disappearing. Both Common Nighthawk and the Chimney Swift were assessed as Threatened. Disturbingly, the cause of these global declines in these, and related birds, is unclear. Sharp declines over 70% in the Red Knot, a migratory shorebird, are also cause for concern – one North American population of this species was deemed Endangered.

Invasive Aliens Put Native Species at Risk

The introduced Zebra Mussel has decimated populations of the Eastern Pondmussel. This freshwater mussel, found in the Great Lakes, has undergone a massive decline. Formerly, it was estimated to occur in the billions. Only two small populations remain in Canada and these are considered Endangered.

The Eastern Flowering Dogwood, one of Canada's showiest native trees, was declared Endangered. Populations of this tree are being infected by Dogwood Anthracnose, an introduced fungus, similar to the disease that has virtually eliminated the American Chestnut.

About COSEWIC

COSEWIC assesses the national status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other important units of biological diversity, that are considered to be at risk in Canada. To do so, COSEWIC uses scientific, Aboriginal traditional and local or community knowledge provided by many experts from governments, academia, other organizations and individuals. Assessment summaries are currently available to the public on the COSEWIC website (www.cosewic.gc.ca) and will be submitted to the Federal Minister of the Environment in August 2007 for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). At that time, the full status reports will be publicly available on the Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca).

There are now [552] species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including [222] Endangered, [139] Threatened, [156] Special Concern, and 22 Extirpated Species (i.e. no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition, 13 are Extinct and 45 are Data Deficient.

COSEWIC comprises members from each provincial and territorial government wildlife agency, four federal entities (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Federal Biodiversity Information Partnership, chaired by the Canadian Museum of Nature), three non-government science members, and the co-chairs of the species specialist and the Aboriginal traditional knowledge subcommittees.

Definition of COSEWIC terms and risk categories:

Wildlife Species: A species, subspecies, variety, or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and is either native to Canada or has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.

Extinct (X): A wildlife species that no longer exists

Extirpated (XT): A wildlife species no longer existing in the wild in Canada, but occurring elsewhere

Endangered (E): A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction

Threatened (T): A wildlife species likely to become Endangered if limiting factors are not reversed

Special Concern (SC): A wildlife species that may become a Threatened or an Endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats

Not at Risk (NAR): A wildlife species that has been evaluated and found to be not at risk of extinction given the current circumstances

Data Deficient (DD): A category that applies when the available information is insufficient (a) to resolve a wildlife species' eligibility for assessment or (b) to permit an assessment of the wildlife species' risk of extinction.

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Further details on all species assessed, and the reasons for designations, can be found on the COSEWIC website at:

www.cosewic.gc.ca

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