



COSEWIC
Committee on the Status of
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

COSEPAC
Comité sur la situation des
espèces en péril au Canada

COSEWIC scientists not ready to declare species extinct yet, but several are on the brink

KELOWNA, BC (May 2, 2016) – Several of Canada’s species continue to decline, based on a recent assessment. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) met last week to evaluate the conservation status of 26 Canadian species. Ten new species were added to a growing list of 739 with only a few showing signs of improvement over the past decade.

“The poor condition of species that we examined during this meeting is, unfortunately, quite typical of what we see year after year”, remarked Dr. Eric Taylor, Chair of the committee and professor of Zoology at the University of British Columbia.

As an independent science advisory body with a mandate under the federal *Species at Risk Act*, COSEWIC plays a key role in monitoring the state of Canada’s biodiversity. From orchids to whales, the committee keeps an eye on the conservation status of Canada’s plants, animals and other organisms.



Sockeye Salmon (mature female) © Dr. E.R. Keeley

At this meeting, COSEWIC considered many complex cases of species facing the threat of extinction. One example was the Sakinaw Sockeye Salmon. Found only in Sakinaw Lake, B.C., which drains to the Strait of Georgia, this population regularly numbered about 4,500 individuals in the period 1960-1990. However, by 2009, none could be found in the lake. Problems both in marine habitats and in the lake appear to have combined to cause the complete disappearance of wild-breeding fish from this population of Sockeye Salmon.

There is, however, still some hope for this critically Endangered species. According to Alan Sinclair, Co-chair of the COSEWIC Marine Fishes Subcommittee: “A Fisheries and Oceans Canada hatchery program has been using fish of Sakinaw Lake origin to replenish the lake. This

could result in the restoration of the population, as spawning of hatchery fish in Sakinaw Lake has been observed. We will know if this recovery effort is successful in a few years.”

Another example of a species with worrying declines was the Eastern Persius Duskywing, one of a group of butterflies that rely on dwindling lupine flowers as host plants. In spite of extensive searching by butterfly enthusiasts and habitat restoration efforts, the Duskywing has not been seen in its southern Ontario range since 1987. “At this point, there’s a slim chance that this butterfly still lives in Canada”, said Jennifer Heron, Co-chair of the Arthropod subcommittee, “And, it is looking more and more likely that this species may soon share the fate of the Karner Blue and Frosted Elfin butterflies, which COSEWIC concluded in 2010 to have been lost from Canada.”

Almost all Canadians know what a lady beetle (or “lady bug”) is, but few people are aware that there are 161 species in Canada -- nine of which are non-native. These invasive lady beetles have become firmly established and have been slowly replacing the native species. For instance, the Nine-spotted Lady Beetle was once one of our most common and widely distributed native lady beetles, but was assessed by COSEWIC as Endangered owing to the major impacts of competition and predation.



Nine-spotted Lady Beetle © John Acorn

Status assessments like those completed in Kelowna last week draw on the expertise, experience, and collaboration of diverse professionals and citizens. As Thomas Jung, a Yukon Government biologist and COSEWIC member said, "Tracking so many plants, animals and other organisms requires careful and tenacious searching and data collection over many years. For these biologists, it is a labour of love.”

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BACKGROUND: What is COSEWIC?

The Canadian *Species at Risk Act* officially recognized the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) as the arms-length advisory body that is responsible for assessing the status of species in Canada and providing recommendations on which species are Endangered, Threatened or Special Concern, and identifying existing and potential threats to the species. The Committee bases its assessments on the best available scientific, community and Aboriginal Traditional knowledge for each species.

The Committee is made up of approximately 50 recognized experts in their fields. There are ten species groups subcommittees that are each represented by two Co-chairs (amphibians and reptiles, arthropods, vascular plants, marine fish, freshwater fish, molluscs, marine mammals,

terrestrial mammals, mosses and lichens, and birds). There are also representatives from each province and territory, the federal departments that have species at risk responsibilities (Environment Canada, Parks Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Canadian Museum of Nature), three non-government science members and the Co-chairs of COSEWIC's Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee.

To date, COSEWIC has assessed 739 species that occur in Canada: 209 are considered Special Concern, 172 have been given a Threatened status, 320 are considered Endangered, 23 are Extirpated (no longer found in Canada), and 15 have been declared as Extinct globally.

Next meeting

COSEWIC's next scheduled wildlife species assessment meeting will be held in November, 2016 in Ottawa.

Definition of COSEWIC terms and status 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 that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere.

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

Threatened (T): A wildlife species that is likely to become Endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction.

Special Concern (SC): A wildlife species that may become Threatened or Endangered 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.

Species at Risk: A wildlife species that has been assessed as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened or Special Concern.

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<p>For inquiries on amphibians and reptiles: (Unisexual <i>Ambystoma</i> salamanders, Northern Rubber Boa, Spiny Softshell)</p> <p>Dr. Kristiina Ovaska Biolinx Environmental Research Ltd. Telephone: 250-727-9708 ke.ovaska@gmail.com</p>	<p>For inquiries on arthropods (insects and related taxa): (Eastern Persius Duskywing, Nine-spotted Lady Beetle)</p> <p>Jennifer M. Heron BC Ministry of Environment Telephone: 604-828-2542 jenniferheron@gmail.com</p>
<p>For inquiries on birds: (McCown's Longspur, Red Crossbill <i>percna</i> subspecies)</p> <p>Dr. Marcel Gahbauer Stantec Telephone: 613-784-2216 marcel@migrationresearch.org</p>	<p>For inquiries on freshwater fishes: (River Darter, Northern Sunfish)</p> <p>Dr. John R. Post University of Calgary Telephone: 403-220-6937 Fax: 403-289-9311 jrpost@ucalgary.ca</p>

<p>For inquiries on marine fishes: (Sockeye Salmon)</p> <p>Alan F. Sinclair Telephone: 250-714-5690 alanfsinclair@me.com</p>	<p>For inquiries on terrestrial mammals: (Pacific Water Shrew)</p> <p>Dr. Graham Forbes University of New Brunswick Telephone: 506-455-5923 forbes@unb.ca</p>
<p>For inquiries on marine mammals: (Harbour Porpoise)</p> <p>Dr. David S. Lee Telephone: 514-754-8524 david.lee@mail.mcgill.ca</p>	<p>For inquiries on molluscs: (Blue-grey Taildropper, Pygmy Slug, Sheathed Slug, Shortface Lanx)</p> <p>Dr. Joseph Carney Lakehead University Telephone: 403-762-0864 jcarney@lakeheadu.ca</p>
<p>For inquiries mosses and lichens: (Mountain Crab-eye, Wrinkled Shingle Lichen, Porter's Twisted Moss, Pygmy Pocket Moss)</p> <p>Dr. René Belland University of Alberta Telephone: 780-492-0801 rbelland@ualberta.ca</p>	<p>For inquiries on plants: (Baikal Sedge)</p> <p>Del Meidinger Meidinger Ecological Consultants Ltd. Telephone: 250-881-1180 delmeidinger@gmail.com</p>
<p>For inquiries on Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge:</p> <p>Dr. Donna Hurlburt Telephone: 902-532-1341 donna.hurlburt@eastlink.ca</p>	

Further details on all wildlife species assessed can be found on the COSEWIC website at: www.cosewic.gc.ca