



COSEWIC
Committee on the Status of
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

COSEPAC
Comité sur la situation des
espèces en péril au Canada

Killer Whale Faces Uncertain Future

A west coast icon is still at risk according to an independent science body. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) met in Ottawa, Ontario from November 25 to 28, 2008 to assess the status of 21 wildlife species.

Since last assessed in 2001, the Killer Whale remains at risk within much of its Canadian range although the species is not at risk of global extinction. Killer whales live in tight family groups that interact only to a limited extent. They were assessed as five distinct populations. In particular, one west coast resident population near Victoria whose diet is tied to dwindling Chinook Salmon runs contains only 48 adults, leading to a status designation of ENDANGERED. Adult numbers of only slightly more than 100 lead to a designation of THREATENED for three additional west coast populations. The remaining population was assessed as SPECIAL CONCERN. Unfortunately, these patterns reflect the global status for marine mammals in general – a recent analysis estimates a third of the world's marine mammals to be at risk of extinction.

A History of Harvest Pushes this Fish to the Brink

The Roundnose Grenadier, an east coast deep-water marine fish was assessed as ENDANGERED given an unprecedented decline in abundance of greater than 95% in the past 10 years. Although directed commercial harvest in Canada stopped in 1974, fisheries outside Canadian waters remain largely unregulated, and surveys show a continuing decline for this long-lived, slow-maturing species. This reflects global trends for commercially harvested fish stocks, 75% of which are fully exploited, overfished or depleted according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Two Habitat Specialists Endangered

The globally rare Cobblestone Tiger Beetle requires cobblestone areas that are seasonally flooded and is reported from only a single river in New Brunswick. The Lake Chubsucker, a small fish restricted to only four drainages in southern Ontario has suffered declines associated with loss of clear water habitats. Given such restricted distribution and habitat needs, these wildlife species face a high risk of extirpation in Canada and were assessed as ENDANGERED.

Canada's Mediterranean Worth Protecting

Vancouver Island's south coast experiences a Mediterranean-like climate that supports ecosystems found nowhere else in Canada. In particular, remnant patches of the Garry Oak ecosystems cover only 5% of their original range. These ecosystems play an important cultural role for the First Nations of the area and support hundreds of plants, birds, reptiles and insects, most of which are strict habitat specialists. COSEWIC assessed three plants found in this region as ENDANGERED OR THREATENED and one as EXTIRPATED bringing the total number of at-risk plants from Garry Oak and closely related ecosystems in the area to 37.

Longevity has its Risks

Long-lived animals breed later in life. Thus, survival of these wildlife species is highly susceptible to threats that increase adult mortality. This is the case for a large pigeon found in southern British Columbia and for the Snapping Turtle, Canada's largest freshwater reptile. The Band-tailed Pigeon has suffered long-term declines in abundance due to massive hunting pressure in the past and was assessed as SPECIAL CONCERN. The widely distributed Snapping Turtle, which can live for over 100 years, was assessed as SPECIAL CONCERN because of illegal harvesting, persecution and mortality on roads that increase adult death rates; this brings the total number of at-risk freshwater turtles in Canada to 10.

Next meeting

COSEWIC's next scheduled wildlife species assessment meeting goes to the east coast, where it will be held in New Brunswick from April 26 to May 1, 2009.

About COSEWIC

COSEWIC assesses the status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other important units of biological diversity, considered to be at risk in Canada. To do so, COSEWIC uses scientific, Aboriginal traditional and community knowledge provided by experts from governments, academia and other organizations. Summaries of assessments 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 late summer 2009 for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). At that time, the full status reports will be publicly available on the SARA Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca).

There are now 577 wildlife species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including 238 Endangered, 146 Threatened, 157 Special Concern, and 23 Extirpated wildlife species (i.e. no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition, 13 are Extinct and 44 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 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.

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