



COSEWIC
Committee on the Status of
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

COSEPAC
Comité sur la situation des
espèces en péril au Canada

Peregrine Falcon achieves landmark recovery but salmon struggle

OTTAWA, ONTARIO (Dec 4, 2017). The Peregrine Falcon is no longer at risk of extinction throughout most of Canada. The Peregrine – an icon of wildlife conservation – was among 44 wildlife species assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) in Ottawa, Nov 26 - Dec 1. The meeting marked the committee's 40 year anniversary.



Peregrine Falcon © Gordon Court

Once near extinction in Canada, the Peregrine Falcon was among the first species assessed by COSEWIC, in 1978. The species' numbers have increased steadily across much of Canada, and its main population was assessed this year as Not at Risk. This recovery was enabled by a ban on DDT (a notoriously toxic pesticide), and by an extensive captive breeding program. For their part, the birds showed resilience and adaptability, including rapid expansion into cities where they exploit urban nest sites and prey. According to Marcel Gahbauer, Co-chair of COSEWIC's Birds Specialist Subcommittee, "The ongoing recovery of the Peregrine represents a rare but important example of how focussed stewardship can lead to success. This is definitely a good news story."

Peregrines have not recovered uniformly, however, and COSEWIC re-assessed the *pealei*

subspecies of Peregrine, on the Pacific Coast, as Special Concern. This recommendation is possible because COSEWIC may separately assess multiple populations if they are sufficiently distinct within the species. "This allows for a more refined consideration of how a species is faring across its entire range," Gahbauer explains.

The assessment of another iconic species, the Pacific Coast's Fraser River Sockeye Salmon, illustrates the importance of such population-based evaluations. Fraser River Sockeye was once the basis of a large and vibrant BC fishery. Periodic collapses have caused serious concern, with 2016 seeing the lowest number of salmon returning to the Fraser River since records began in 1893. Twenty-four distinct groups of Sockeye Salmon journey up the Fraser River to their

respective spawning sites. They are exposed both to common threats in the ocean and the river, and for some, to particular threats on their spawning grounds. COSEWIC recommended 8 populations as Endangered, 2 as Threatened, and 5 as Special Concern. Nine populations were stable or increasing and so were assessed as being Not at Risk.

Three populations of the Pacific Grey Whale using Canadian waters were also assessed. These represent Grey Whales' last global stronghold, following their historical extirpation from the Atlantic Ocean due to whaling. All three groups winter in Mexican waters, but move along the Canadian coast to spend the rest of the year feeding in different regions. A remnant population that summers along the Russian coast, and a second small group that feeds near Vancouver Island and adjacent waters, were both assessed as



Grey Whale © Jim Darling, Pacific Wildlife Foundation

Endangered. In contrast, the largest population, which travels along the Pacific coast to Alaska, was assessed as Not at Risk. Numbers in this third group are high and stable, and threats appear to be low.

Sherman Boates, representative from Nova Scotia and COSEWIC's longest-serving member, summed up this meeting's deliberations: "As always, COSEWIC worked hard to provide rigorous assessments of diverse species including two mosses and a whale. Our assessments form the foundation of conservation planning and action by governments, Indigenous communities, conservation groups, industry and individual Canadians."

At the meeting, a number of other wildlife species were found to be at some level of risk. Examples include:

- Four endemic species, for which Canada carries full global responsibility:
 - Vancouver Lamprey, found in only three Vancouver Island lakes (Threatened)
 - Northern Saw-whet Owl *brooksi* subspecies, unique to Haida Gwaii forests (Threatened)
 - Quebec Rockcress, which grows only on certain Gaspé Peninsula limestone cliffs (Endangered)
 - Verna's Flower Moth, which is found exclusively in the Canadian prairies (Threatened)
- Lumpfish, an Atlantic Ocean species fished for their caviar-like eggs (Threatened)
- Dolphin and Union Caribou in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, which migrate across sea ice affected by climate change and shipping activity (Endangered)

Further details on all wildlife species assessed at this meeting can be found on the COSEWIC website at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/committee-status-endangered-wildlife.html>

Next meeting

COSEWIC's next scheduled wildlife species assessment meeting will be held in April 2018.

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 (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/committee-status-endangered-wildlife/wildlife-species-assessment.html>) and will be submitted to the Federal Minister of the Environment and Climate Change in fall 2018 for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). At that time, the status reports and status appraisal summaries will be publicly available on the Species at Risk Public Registry (<http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca/>).

At its most recent meeting, COSEWIC assessed 44 wildlife species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including 14 Endangered, 9 Threatened, and 10 Special Concern. In addition to these wildlife species that are in COSEWIC risk categories, COSEWIC assessed 11 as Not at Risk

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 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 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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