

Nature Conservation: New assessment by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) highlights continuing decline of Europe's mammals

The first assessment of all European mammals, commissioned by the European Commission and carried out by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), shows that nearly one in every six mammal species is threatened with extinction. The population trends are equally alarming: a quarter (27%) of all mammals had declining populations and a further 33% had an unknown population trend. Only 8% were identified as increasing, including the European bison. The report also highlights successful recoveries resulting from targeted conservation measures and shows that to reverse the observed decline such measures need to be integrated into the sectoral natural resource use policies of the EU.

Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said: "The results of the report highlight the challenge we currently face to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010, as European governments have promised. It is clear that the full implementation of the Habitats Directive, which covers nearly all mammals found threatened in this assessment, is of utmost importance to protect Europe's species".

World Conservation Union Director-General Julia Marton-Lefèvre said: "This new assessment proves that many European mammals are declining at an alarming rate. However, we still have the power to reverse that trend, as the case of the European bison which was brought back from extinction clearly shows."

Nearly one in six European mammals are threatened with extinction

Europe contains a rich diversity of mammals ranging from the small and rarely seen nocturnal shrews and voles to the elusive brown bear. But the results of the European Mammal Assessment are clear: some 15%, or almost one sixth, of mammals are threatened in Europe. The situation of marine mammals is even bleaker: some 22% are classified as threatened with extinction. The true number is likely to be even higher, as almost 44% were classified as *Data Deficient* due to missing information. By comparison, 13% of European birds are threatened.

The main threats to European mammals are habitat degradation and loss, such as deforestation or wetland drainage, followed by pollution and over-harvesting. For marine species, pollution and accidental mortality from fisheries by-catch or ship collisions are the main risks. These threats are most severe in the enclosed seas of the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black Sea.

Within the European Union six species have been classified as *Critically Endangered*. The most threatened category includes the Arctic fox and the European mink, which both have very small and declining populations. Only 150 Iberian Lynxes survive today and the Mediterranean Monk Seal population has decreased to between 350-450 individuals.

Europe is one of the best studied regions of the world, but no overall view of the conservation status of mammals across the continent had been compiled. To fill that gap, the European Union commissioned the World Conservation Union (IUCN) to assess all mammals of continental Europe against the IUCN Red List criteria in order to identify Europe's most threatened mammals and assist setting conservation priorities. The assessment showed that Europe's mountains and the Balkan Peninsula are home to the greatest diversity of different species. This wealth of biodiversity forms an arc which extends from the Pyrenees through the Alps towards the Carpathians and Rhodopes in South Eastern Europe. The greatest concentration of threatened species was found in Bulgaria.

To reverse the decline of Europe's mammals the study recommends that European Union nature conservation policies be urgently implemented, that species action plans be developed, and that nature conservation be integrated into European Union sectoral natural resource use policies.

Notes to Editors

The European Mammal Assessment is publicly available at:
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/species/ema/>

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is available at:
<http://www.redlist.org>

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Regional Office for Europe
<http://www.iucneurope.org>

The Countdown 2010 Initiative
<http://www.countdown2010.net>