



# Species

ISSUE 64

## 2023 Report of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and Secretariat



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## The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC)

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a science-based network of thousands of volunteer experts from almost every country of the world, all working together toward achieving the vision of “a just world that values and conserves nature through positive action to both prevent the loss and aid recovery of the diversity of life on earth.”

Members of SSC belong to one or more of near 200 Specialist Groups, Red List Authorities, Action Partnerships, Task Forces, and Conservation Committees that make up the Network, each focusing on a taxonomic group (plants, fungi, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and invertebrates), national species, or a disciplinary issue, such as sustainable use and livelihoods, translocation of species, wildlife health, climate change, and conservation planning.

Framed by the Species Conservation Cycle, SSC’s major role is to provide information to IUCN on biodiversity conservation, the inherent value of species, their role in ecosystem health and functioning, the provision of ecosystem services, and their support to human livelihoods. This information is fed into the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

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### 2021-2025 Species Strategic Plan

The IUCN Species Strategic Plan encompasses the joint work of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and a number of partnerships to achieve more than 2,700 targets proposed by the Network during the 2021-2025 quadrennium.

To accomplish those targets, the Species Conservation Cycle was established, which is the conceptual framework for the Network activities. The Species Conservation Cycle’s main purpose is to guide efforts for valuing and conserving biodiversity through three essential components that are linked to each other:

**ASSESS:** Understand and inform the world about the status and trends of biodiversity.

**PLAN:** Develop collaborative, inclusive and science-based conservation strategies, plans and policies.

**ACT:** Convene and mobilise conservation actions to improve the status of biodiversity.



Their implementation requires two transversal components:

**NETWORK:** Enhance and support our immediate network and alliances to achieve our biodiversity targets.

**COMMUNICATE:** Drive strategic and targeted communications to enhance our conservation impact.

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### SSC Species Report

Annual progress in the implementation of the 2021-2025 Species Strategic Plan is documented in the SSC *Species Report*, which consists of a comprehensive description and analysis of the activities and results generated by the members of the SSC Network and Centers for Species Survival (CSS) each year. Each SSC and CSS group contributes to this document by providing a yearly summarised description of their achievements, which is presented in stand-alone reports.

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## Structure of the IUCN SSC and CSS Stand-alone Reports

Stand-alone reports summarize the activities conducted and results generated by each group member of the SSC and CSS. Following, is the structure of the stand-alone report and the contents under each session.

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### Title of the group

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### Photograph(s) of the Chair/Co-Chairs

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### Group information

Includes names of Chair/Co-Chairs, Vice-Chairs, Deputy Chairs, Red List Authority Coordinators, Program Officers, Species Survival Directors, and Species Survival Officers, their institutional affiliations, number of members and social networks currently active.

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### Logo of the group

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### Mission statement

Includes the mission of the group.

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### Projected impact for the 2021-2025 quadrennium

Includes the description of the impact on species conservation resulting from the implementation of the targets formulated by the group for the 2021-2025 quadrennium.

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### Targets for the 2021-2025 quadrennium

Includes the targets planned by the SSC or CSS group for the 2021-2025 quadrennium ordered alphabetically by component of the Species Conservation Cycle. Each target is labeled with a numerical code (e.g., T-001, T-012) that identifies it in the SSC DATA database and its status for the reported year is indicated (Not initiated, On track or Achieved).

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### Activities and results

Includes the targets for which activities were conducted and results were generated during the reported year, ordered alphabetically, first by component of the Species Conservation Cycle, and second by Activity Category. Description of activities and results includes the indicator that best describes progress, its associated quantitative or qualitative result, and the narrative description of the activity conducted or result obtained. Each activity or result reported is linked to the Key Species Result to which it is mainly associated (e.g., KSR#1, KSR#5).

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### Acknowledgements

Includes the acknowledgements to funding agencies, partners, and persons who contributed to the progress of the targets of the group.

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### Summary of achievements

Summarises information of the group's strategic plan for the quadrennium and progress achieved implementing targets for all the components of the Species Conservation Cycle during the reported year.

Animalia

Fungi

Plantae

National Species

Disciplinary

Action Partnership

Task Force

Red List Authority

Committee

Center for Species Survival

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### Example for the recommended citation:

Garshelis, D., Proctor, M. and Morin, D. 2024. 2023 Report of the Bear Specialist Group. In: IUCN SSC and Secretariat. *2023 Report of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and Secretariat*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. 6 pp.

## 2023 Report

# IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group



**CO-CHAIR**  
**Dave Garshelis**  
Cohasset, Minnesota,  
US



**CO-CHAIR**  
**Michael Proctor**  
(until September 2023)  
Birchdale Ecological,  
Kaslo, BC, Canada



**DEPUTY CHAIR**  
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**RED LIST AUTHORITY  
COORDINATORS**  
**Karine Pigeon**  
British Columbia  
Ministry of Water, Land  
and Resource Stew-  
ardship, Smithers BC,  
Canada  
**Bruce McLellan**  
Darcy, British  
Columbia, Canada  
(retired)

**NUMBER OF MEMBERS**  
250

#### SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITES

Facebook: [IUCN SSC Bear Specialist Group](#)  
Instagram: [@globalbearconservation](#)  
Website: [www.globalbearconservation.org](http://www.globalbearconservation.org)

### Mission statement

The Bear Specialist Group (BSG) strives to promote the conservation of bears living in their natural habitats across their world-wide distribution. We do this by collecting, synthesising and disseminating information; aiding, promoting and supporting conservation initiatives; providing technical assistance and capacity building for those involved or interested in bear conservation, and becoming directly involved in issues that reduce threats and foster the conservation of any of the seven species of terrestrial bears.

### Projected impact 2021–2025

We anticipate making significant gains in implementing the Sun Bear Conservation Action Plan, creating action plans and improved range maps for other bear species, disseminating information (published articles in journals and newsletters, webinars, and presentations at conferences), and increasing the breadth of our leadership through enhanced opportunities for members to partake in higher roles.

### Targets 2021–2025

#### ASSESS

**T-001** Finish bear bile situation analysis.  
Status: On track

**T-009** Refine range map for bears.  
Status: On track

**T-012** Assess Red List status for Sun Bears (*Helarctos malayanus*) in Viet Nam.  
Status: Not initiated

**T-013** Create a reference database on conservation-relevant *ex situ* bear research.  
Status: Achieved

**T-014** Establish a list of bear sanctuaries worldwide.  
Status: Achieved

**T-015** Create a catalogue on bear husbandry basics.  
Status: On track

**PLAN**

**T-007** Develop a conservation action plan for Asiatic Black Bears (*Ursus thibetanus*).  
Status: On track

**T-016** Create a field manual to aid in alleviating human-bear conflicts.  
Status: On track

**T-018** Increase transnational population management and monitoring.  
Status: On track

#### ACT

**T-005** Implement Sun Bear Action Plan.  
Status: On track

**T-006** Develop monitoring protocols for Asian bears.  
Status: On track

**T-019** Provide technical advice for situation-specific conservation issues.  
Status: On track

**T-020** Publish papers and reports that provide recommendations for conservation actions.  
Status: On track

#### NETWORK

**T-004** Secure long-term viable funding base.  
Status: On track

**T-008** Create training modules to increase capacity in bear conservation.  
Status: On track

Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*) photographed from a hide in Karelia, Finland. Hides are used for ecotourism and hunting  
 Photo: Vincenzo Penteriani



**T-010** Increase the breadth and diversity of the BSG.

Status: Achieved

**COMMUNICATE**

**T-002** Finish website.

Status: Achieved

**T-003** Ensure regular communication with the bear community.

Status: On track

**T-017** Establish large communication events to convey information to large audiences and promote bear conservation.

Status: On track

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**Activities and results 2023**

**ASSESS**

**Communication**

**T-013** Create a reference database on conservation-relevant *ex situ* bear research. (KSR 5)

Creation of a database: 0%

Result description: The Zotero database was updated with new papers. Creation was achieved in 2022.

**T-014** Establish a list of bear sanctuaries worldwide. (KSR 5)

Creation of a list of sanctuaries that could take orphaned bears, when needed: 100%

Result description: In 2023, the database was updated with some new entries.

**T-015** Create a catalogue on bear husbandry basics. (KSR 5)

Creation of a manual: 40%

Result description: The development of the manual is well underway, with substantial progress made on drafting several sections.

**Red List**

**T-009** Refine range map for bears. (KSR 6)

Improved range map created: 0

Result description: We recruited a PhD student to oversee the Asian mapping project. She began in November of 2023 with start-up activities at the Smithsonian. A first initiative involves designing an app whereby people can easily enter data. We also have been involved with the AZA's Sloth Bear SAFE and Andean Bear SAFE, which will help to fund the mapping of these two species.

**T-012** Assess Red List status for Sun Bears (*H. malayanus*) in Vietnam. (KSR 6)

Number of new national Red List assessments published: 0

Result description: Very preliminary work was done in 2023, sources of data were identified to inform Red List Assessment and options for analytical methods were explored.

**PLAN**

**Planning**

**T-007** Develop a conservation action plan for Asiatic Black Bears (*U. thibetanus*). (KSR 8)

Number of conservation plans/strategies developed: 2

Result description: Instead of a range-wide action plan for Asiatic Black Bears, we are supporting the development of country-specific plans. Plans for Taiwan and Bhutan have been accomplished as of this year.

**T-016** Create a field manual to aid in alleviating human-bear conflicts. (KSR 8)

Number of technical documents to support the development of conservation plans/strategies: 0

Result description: Draft chapters have been submitted and are currently being reviewed and edited. The manual is about 75% completed.

#### **Policy**

##### **T-018 Increase transnational population management and monitoring. (KSR 8)**

Number of regions where transnational plans and policies are developed: 1

Result description: The regional Large Carnivore Platform for Dinara-Balkan-Pindos populations was established and the process of MoU signing among countries in the region is underway. The goal is increased collaboration in management and monitoring of large carnivores (especially bears) that range across national borders. This might be the first agreement ever among countries with turbulent political relations.

#### **ACT**

##### **Conservation actions**

##### **T-005 Implement Sun Bear Action Plan. (KSR 10)**

Number of actions addressing major drivers/emerging threats of species or population loss: 5

In 2023, significant progress was achieved across various objectives outlined in the Sun Bear Action Plan. Behaviour change interventions aimed at reducing the demand for bear bile as medicine were successfully implemented in Cambodia, with partial funding from the National Geographic Species Recovery Grant. An impact evaluation is scheduled for 2024 to assess the effectiveness of these interventions. Throughout the year, research efforts continued to understand

the motivations behind Sun Bear hunting, with findings set to be published in 2024. A team dedicated to Objective 7 reviewed papers exploring the effects of roads on tropical bear species. Funding was secured for researching Sun Bear's utilisation of plantations as part of Objective 8. Objective 9 saw the completion of a survey on Sun Bear distribution in Brunei and the refutation of claims regarding Sun Bear's presence in Nagaland, India. Various studies and collaborations under Objective 15, including those addressing olfactory stimulation at Cologne Zoo and Sun Bear behavioural ontogeny at Burgers' Zoo Arnhem, progressed significantly. Collaborations with zoos and organizations worldwide were initiated to study genetic identification methods, and factors affecting breeding success and climbing behaviours, contributing to both *ex situ* and *in situ* Sun Bear conservation efforts. These activities collectively represent the tangible results achieved in 2023 towards the conservation and understanding of Sun Bear populations.

##### **T-006 Develop monitoring protocols for Asian bears. (KSR 10)**

Number of technical documents provided to support conservation actions: 0

Result description: We sent an email to the BSG membership to request potential case studies for a sixth applied paper to complement the Special Section we completed in 2022.

##### **T-020 Publish papers and reports that provide recommendations for conservation actions. (KSR 10)**

Number of technical documents provided to support conservation actions: 1

Result description: In 2023, an SSC publication was produced: Garshelis, DL and Groff, C. (2023). 'The tenuous coexistence between people and a rapidly recovering bear population'. *IUCN Species Survival Commission Quarterly Report*. June, pp.19-21. Additionally, BSG teams are currently working on two other papers on 'using harvest statistics for monitoring American Black Bear demographics' and 'impact of roads on tropical bears'.

#### **Technical advice**

##### **T-019 Provide technical advice for situation-specific conservation issues. (KSR 10)**

Freely provide technical advice when requested or a need presents itself: Ongoing.

Result description Numerous consultations were made with researchers around the world, providing technical advice on population monitoring, camera trapping, species identification, and mitigation of human-bear conflicts (including fatalities). Assistance was provided with grant writing and fundraising for small research and conservation projects. High-level consultations and technical advice were provided for governments — e.g. Grizzly Bear reintroductions, hunting regulations, and development of habitat corridors.

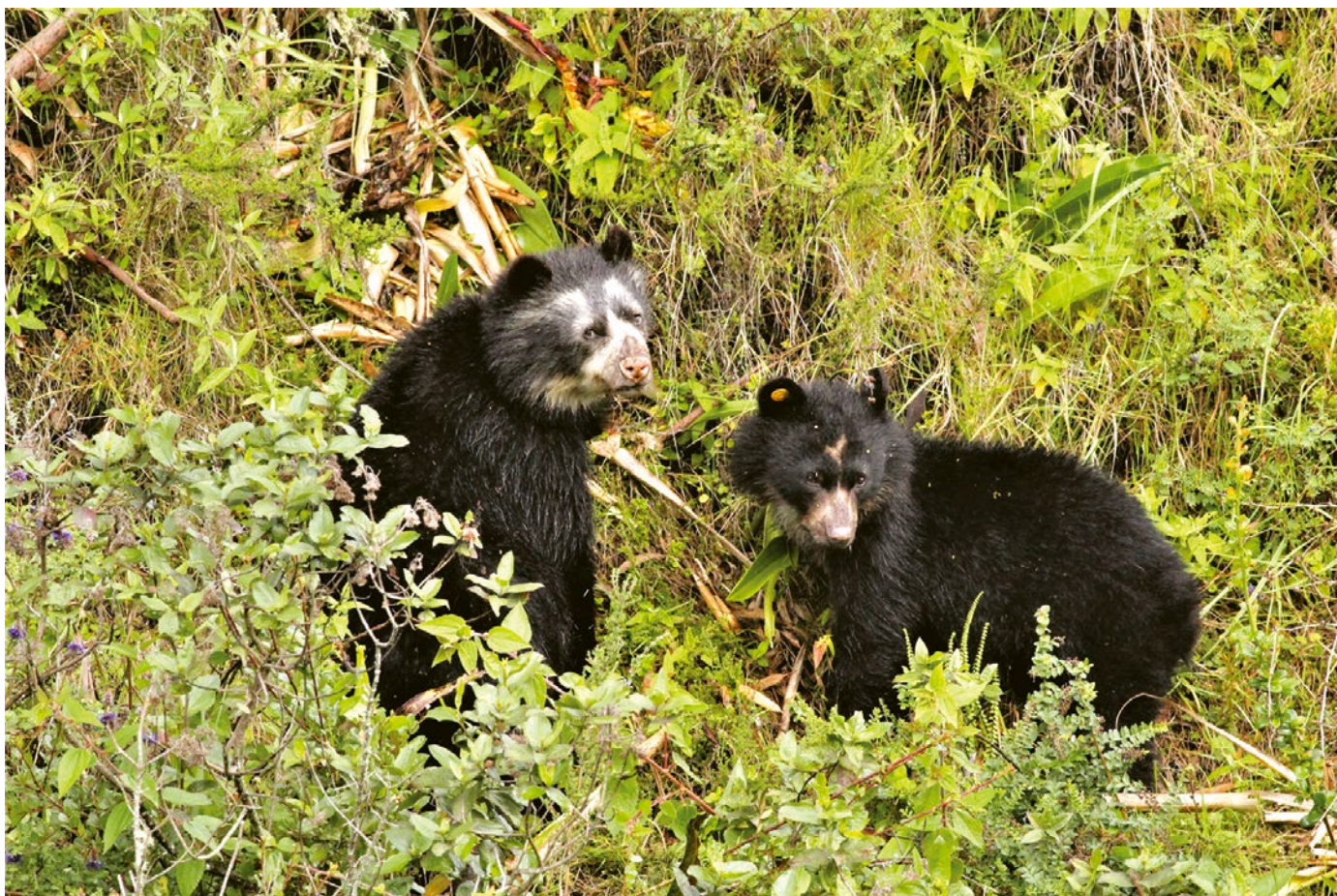
#### **NETWORK**

##### **Capacity building**

##### **T-008 Create training modules to increase capacity in bear conservation. (KSR 2)**

Number of training modules produced: 5

Result description: We held five webinars and posted them on our website and [YouTube](#) channel.



Andean Bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*) in Angochagua Imbabura province, northern Ecuador. Radio-collared mother and tagged offspring. Photo: Andres Laguna

## Membership

### T-010 Increase the breadth and diversity of the BSG. (KSR 2)

Number of SSC members recruited: 6

Result description: We have successfully added six new members: two from China, two from Sri Lanka, one from Nepal and one from Vietnam.

### Synergy

#### T-004 Secure long-term viable funding base. (KSR 1)

Number of 'funding' partners established and maintained: 1

Result description: In 2023, we have continued a strong collaboration with the Taiwan Black Bear Conservation Association. The TBBCA completely funds our new website.

## COMMUNICATE

### Communication

#### T-002 Finish website. (KSR 12)

Number of web pages developed and maintained: Ongoing.

Result description: We launched the website in May 2023, containing detailed accounts of each species and various topics, as well as information about the BSG. The website contains downloadable high-quality range maps, and >150

downloadable photos submitted by BSG members, showing species biology and ecology, threats, and conservation actions. Webinars are also available. The website is continually being updated.

#### T-003 Ensure regular communication with the bear community. (KSR 12)

Number of published articles per year: 13

Result description: We published 12 articles in *International Bear News* and one article in the SSC Quarterly Newsletter.

We held over 30 Zoom calls involving BSG species, topical, or project teams.

#### T-017 Establish large communication events to convey information to large audiences and promote bear conservation. (KSR 13)

Number of communication events carried out: 1

Result description: We celebrated the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Sloth Bear Day, with numerous events held across India, where governmental and non-governmental organizations participated. Significant efforts were made to increase species awareness and reduce conflicts (especially attacks), with printed educational materials, videos, mimes, and the development of a bear deterrent stick ('Ghanti kathi') that people can carry for protection.

## Acknowledgements

We thank the Taiwan Black Bear Conservation Association for its continued support of our website.

## Summary of achievements

Total number of targets 2021–2025: 19

Geographic regions: 12 Global, 6 Asia, 1 Europe

### Actions during 2023:

Assess: 5 (KSR 5, 6)

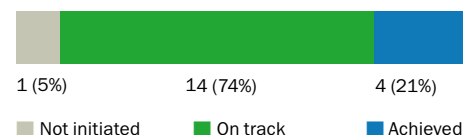
Plan: 3 (KSR 8)

Act: 4 (KSR 10)

Network: 3 (KSR 1, 2)

Communicate: 3 (KSR 12, 13)

### Overall achievement 2021–2025:





*Nothobranchius fuscotaeniatus*  
Photo: Csenge Nagy



*Tetra Parnaiba*  
Photo: Karina Molina



*Trioceros hoehnelii*  
Photo: Christopher V. Anderson



*Sternberia lutea*  
Photo: Hayri Duman



*Egretta rufescens*  
Photo: Ernesto Gómez



*Lactifluus neotropicus*  
Photo: Aida Vasco



Mayfly nymph (*Ecdyonurus* sp.)  
Photo: Astrid Schmidt-Kloiber and Wolfram Graf