

## **Reassessing the Red Data List of Mammals for South Africa**

**By Matthew Child, EWT Red Data List Intern**

Life on Earth is undergoing its sixth major extinction crisis. We must understand the risk of each species becoming extinct to prioritise conservation measures and allocate scarce funding effectively. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) established a Red List system in 1963 to objectively categorise the probability of extinction for every species on the planet. Assessments are carried out through vast networks of scientists and conservationists pooling their expert knowledge. Red Lists have become the backbone of global conservation, and are a unified and standardised protocol to set conservation priorities and policies.

However, extinctions occur regionally before globally. Thus, national Red Lists are needed to feed into global assessments and to identify species of national importance. South Africa is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. Our 298 mammal species perform essential ecological functions (such as maintaining ecosystem structure, seed-dispersal, and pollination) and thus provide ecosystem services (such as nutrient cycling, food production and pest control) across the country. Mammals also hold direct economic value through wildlife ranching, game auctions and ecotourism. The 'Big 5' species attract foreign tourists to South Africa while rarer species and 'wilderness' areas provide much-relished recreation for local ecotourists. It is evident that South Africa's mammals represent huge commercial and cultural value. Africa is the only continent where large, charismatic mammals still survive and Red Data Lists are crucial to ensuring their continued survival.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) produced the first Red Data List of Mammals of South Africa in 2004. However, with ever increasing development pressures and rising human populations, extinction risks change and so require constant monitoring and reviewing. This is why the EWT will be updating the Red Data List of Mammals of South Africa. This will allow us to reassess extinction risks; measure conservation progress over the past decade; and prioritise imperilled species for future planning.

This will be the first ever complete re-assessment of South African mammals and will provide

- a revised Red Data List (both hardcopy and online);
- a popular booklet describing major findings;
- scientific publications;
- a platform for citizens to engage with mammal conservation.

The project will be completed in 12-14 months and consists of four phases:

1. Contacting and recruiting all mammal experts in South Africa to pool information;
2. Training >100 key experts to perform the assessments and reviews;
3. Reviewing the assessments to ensure accuracy; and
4. Collating the assessments, producing the final Red Data List and associated documents, and distributing to stakeholders, policy-makers and sponsors.

This project will bring together mammal experts, scientists, politicians, citizens, landowners and conservationists to produce key databases and documents for South Africa's sustainable future. Everyone has a stake in our mammals, and everyone can contribute to conservation. We must know the extinction risks of our mammals before we can mitigate them. For further information contact Matthew Child on [matthewc@ewt.org.za](mailto:matthewc@ewt.org.za)

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