

## New National Species Specialist Group in Nigeria

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) recently established National Species Specialist Groups to allow both existing and new SSC members in taxonomic/thematic SSC Groups to organize geographically, including at national and sub-national levels. This facilitated the creation of the Nigeria Species Specialist Group in February 2024.

Nigeria's land area of over 920,000 km<sup>2</sup> includes a wide range of ecosystems, from coastal habitats along the Atlantic coast to Sahelian and arid habitats on the edge of the Sahara, and an accompanying rich diversity of species. However, Nigeria's growing population of over 200 million people and their dependence on its natural resources, sometimes in unsustainable ways, continues to threaten the country's biodiversity. The newly established Specialist Group provides a much-needed national platform to mobilize, develop and deploy conservation expertise to stem and reverse species declines and losses in Nigeria. It builds upon the existing framework of Nigeria's Key Biodiversity Area National Coordination Group, which is already mobilizing expertise to identify and map critical sites for biodiversity conservation.

The Specialist Group will work alongside the new Center for Species Survival Nigeria and other conservation partners to apply IUCN tools and knowledge products to assess the status of species and ecosystems and develop conservation plans. In line with the IUCN Species Strategic plan 2021–2025 and with support from the Center for Species Survival Nigeria, the Specialist Group will conduct national Red List assessments for species and ecosystems, develop national conservation action plans for threatened and endemic species and sites, build multi-stakeholder and collaborative conservation action partnerships for the implementation of agreed actions, and integrate and mainstream outputs from its activities to strengthen Nigeria's National Biodiversity Strategy and Policies.

The Nigeria Species Specialist Group is hosted by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation. The Specialist Group will convene cross-sectoral expertise, and its founding membership includes a Chair, a 12-member steering committee and nine Species Working Groups (for amphibians, birds, freshwater species, fungi, invertebrates, mammals, marine species, reptiles and plants), each led by a coordinating team. Coordinating teams will recruit members and coordinate Species Working Group plans. The Nigeria Species Specialist Group is the second national species specialist group to be established in Africa.

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## Center for Species Survival Nigeria launches programme of work

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) is driving global conservation efforts by fostering strategic partnerships to establish Centers for Species Survival. In August 2023, Africa's first Center for Species Survival was created in Nigeria through a strategic partnership between the SSC and the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, a centre of excellence for conservation training at the University of Jos, with > 20 years of conservation capacity development experience in West Africa. Through this partnership, the Center for Species Survival Nigeria is poised to further enhance conservation capacity in West Africa through the application of IUCN tools and knowledge products, fostering partnerships, and scaling up actions to protect and restore biodiversity in Nigeria and across the region.

The new Center initiated its programme of work in January 2024, beginning with a preliminary review of all assessed species in Nigeria, identifying > 500 species (c. 10% of assessed species in the country) that are currently categorized as threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (67 species as Critically Endangered, 162 as Endangered and 274 as Vulnerable). Most are plants (54%), followed by fishes (21%), mammals (11%), and birds (5%). Other groups include reptiles (3%), amphibians (3%), insects (1%) and crustaceans (1%), with bivalves, cephalopods and gastropods comprising the remaining 1%. This highlights existing gaps and also helps identify priority areas requiring conservation action in Nigeria.

The Center for Species Survival Nigeria is also fostering partnerships and collaborations with other stakeholders, including with the newly established IUCN SSC Nigeria Species Specialist Group. By working alongside partners to conduct national Red List assessments, identify priority species and facilitate conservation planning and action, the Center for Species Survival Nigeria is helping to strengthen the implementation of the Species Conservation Cycle (Assess–Plan–Act–Network–Communicate) in Nigeria and across the region in line with the IUCN Species Strategic Plan 2021–2025.

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