Conservation news

Next generation of global conservation leaders awarded funding and support

The Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP)—an initiative of Fauna & Flora, BirdLife International and the Wildlife Conservation Society—has announced its 2023 award winners. In total, 17 groups of young conservationists have been granted vital funding, and will also be provided with invaluable training and skills development, to strengthen their species-saving projects. This year's award winners are based across the globe—from Honduras to Ghana to Indonesia—and focus on a broad range of species, including the tuco-tuco, a burrowing rodent in Argentina, the Javan slow loris and Sharpe's longclaw, a bird native to Kenyan grasslands.

CLP trains and supports the next generation of conservationists. The programme invests in teams of people at the beginning of their career who are working to protect threatened species in low- and middle-income countries.

Through its 2023 award programme, which is funded by Arcadia, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, and the March Conservation Fund, CLP will provide funding, worth up to a total of USD 280,000, alongside training and support to the 17 projects: six in Africa, five in Asia Pacific and six in Latin America and the Caribbean.

See the full list of projects at conservationleadershipprogramme.org/news/2023-team-awards-announced-latest-conservation-projects.

Becca Thomas (orcid.org/0009-0002-0978-0018, becca.thomas@fauna-flora.org) Fauna & Flora, Cambridge, UK

Russian sturgeon in the eastern Black Sea basin, Georgia

All five species of sturgeon in Georgia, including the Russian sturgeon *Acipenser gueldenstaedtii*, are categorized as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. The latest study carried out by Fauna & Flora and Ilia State University shows that the Rioni River is still the only remaining sturgeon spawning river in the eastern Black Sea. From a total of 117 Russian sturgeon tissue samples (taken from individuals subsequently released into the river from where they were captured) collected from the Black Sea and the Rioni River during August 2018–June 2022, we detected juveniles only in the Rioni River and the mouth of the Black Sea, underlining the importance of the Rioni River as a spawning ground. We captured only 13 adults, all in the Black Sea.

Our findings also provided further evidence of hybridization of the Russian sturgeon and stellate sturgeon *Acipenser stellatus* in the Rioni River (Beridze et al., 2022, *Conservation Genetics*, 23, 211–216). Of the 117 samples, six were identified as hybrids (which produce infertile offspring). In all cases, stellate sturgeon males had mated with Russian sturgeon females, suggesting the stellate sturgeon may be encountering difficulty finding individuals of its own species for mating. Additionally, we found three invasive Siberian sturgeon *Acipenser baerii* (known to be farmed in the region) in the Rioni River. They could further hybridize with and outcompete native sturgeon species. There was an almost 1:1 sex ratio in our 117 Russian sturgeon samples (60 females, 57 males), which is common in juvenile populations but not adult populations (Fortin et al., 1993, *Canadian Journal of Zoology*, 71, 638–650) and suggests individuals may not be surviving to sexual maturity.

Threatened sturgeon species in the eastern Black Sea are facing critical challenges. Hybridization is a clear threat, not only to the Russian and stellate sturgeons but also to the ship sturgeon *Acipenser nudiventris*, which shares the same spawning habitat. Although recruitment is occurring in the Rioni River, individuals may not be surviving to maturity. Given the fact that sturgeons only reach maturity at 7–9 years old, they are extremely vulnerable to extinction. Understanding the structure and status of sturgeon populations in this region will help to target conservation measures to protect the Black Sea ecosystem and some of the evolutionarily oldest living fish species.

Ana Ananiashvili (orcid.org/0000-0002-4186-0723) and Tamar Beridze (orcid.org/0000-0003-4859-1519, tamar.beridze@fauna-flora.org) Faculty of Natural Sciences and Medicine, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia. Bianca Roberts, Mikheil Potskhishvili, Janeli Rogava, Gizo Seskuria, Fleur Scheele and Michelle Klailova (orcid.org/0000-0003-3767-1871) Caucasus Programme, Fauna & Flora, Tbilisi, Georgia*
**Also at: Fauna & Flora, Tbilisi, Georgia*

First global summit on human–wildlife conflict and coexistence

The International Conference on Human–Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence took place from 30 March to 1 April 2023 in Oxford, UK. It was organized by the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Human–Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group (hwctf.org) and co-hosted

with the Global Wildlife Program, which is funded by the Global Environment Facility and led by the World Bank, and the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit of Oxford University, with the support of many other organizations and donors.

The conference brought together > 500 delegates from non-profit, government, academic and donor backgrounds from 70 countries, providing a forum for discussions and the exchange of knowledge. The programme included scientific presentations, panel debates, short courses, keynote speeches and interactive discussions. It was an interdisciplinary conference with participation from ecology, animal behaviour, psychology, policy, political ecology, conflict analysis, mediation and peacebuilding, international development, economics and anthropology.

The conference, postponed since 2020 because of the Covid-19 pandemic, provided a timely response to the formal inclusion of human–wildlife conflict in global policy. The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework agreed at the UN Biodiversity Conference in December 2022 includes a target that calls for countries to 'effectively manage human–wildlife interactions to minimize human–wildlife conflict for coexistence'.

To support coexistence with wildlife, and to help inform new national policies and support action, on 30 March 2023 the Human–Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group released the first edition of the IUCN SSC Guidelines on Human–Wildlife Conflict and Coexistence. The Guidelines, developed by an interdisciplinary team of 50 experts, provide the most comprehensive recommendations for good practice on the topic to date. The publication centres on good process and provides guiding foundations and principles applicable to any human–wildlife conflict situation in any region. The first edition, in English, is available at hwctf.org/guidelines, and will soon be available in additional languages.

Alexandra Zimmermann (orcid.org/0000-0002-4371-3997, alexandra.zimmermann@ssc.iucn.org) IUCN Species Survival Commission Human–Wildlife Conflict & Coexistence Specialist Group, Oxford, UK

China Species Specialist Group: piloting a new initiative for expansion of the IUCN Species Survival Commission

National Species Specialist Groups are a new type of group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), designed to catalyse interdisciplinary cooperation across specialist groups and to develop national species expert networks to help reverse biodiversity loss and face new nature-related sustainability challenges.

The China Species Specialist Group is one of a few recently launched pilot groups (including in Colombia, Indonesia and Madagascar). It focuses on supporting China, the host nation of the Convention of Biological Diversity's recent CoP15, to develop and implement the country's ambitious National Biodiversity Strategic and Action Plan, and to develop a model for pragmatic advancement of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The establishment of this new Specialist Group has improved SSC's ability to provide support to conservation and research projects in China, and opened doors for young professionals, non-English speaking specialists and multi-taxa biodiversity experts to engage in SSC's international community. Since its establishment in 2022, the Specialist Group has recruited > 100 new members into the SSC, launched pilot programmes for young professionals and initiated a comprehensive study in the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area, via the newly formed Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macau Biodiversity Alliance, which the Specialist Group helped establish. Spearheaded by the universities of Sun Yat-Sen, Hong Kong and Macau, the Alliance aims to create an interinstitutional platform for knowledge sharing and regional biosphere collaborations.

The new Specialist Group's pilot biosphere study in the Greater Bay Area aims to examine the dynamic interrelationships between biodiversity and climate for each of the area's 11 municipal biospheres and collectively as a regional biosphere. The study includes tools for spatial planning and sustainable financing, such as the IUCN Red List, and measurable, reportable and verifiable carbon measurements of climate impacts on nature. The Greater Bay Area Biodiversity Alliance is a collaborative model for facilitating cross-border planning and implementation of regional biodiversity strategies and action plans and other nature conservation and sustainability development efforts.

Yan Xie (orcid.org/0000-0002-1778-6818, xieyan@ioz.ac.cn) Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China, and China Species Specialist Group, IUCN Species Survival Commission, Shenzhen, China.
Jon Paul Rodriguez (orcid.org/0000-0001-5019-2870) IUCN Species Survival Commission, Provita, and Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas, Caracas, Venezuela

The IUCN Species Survival Commission launches a new Red List Authority to assess marine invertebrates

Invertebrates comprise the majority of biodiversity in the oceans. The conservation issues facing these taxa, comprising c. 200,000 described and many more undescribed species, are diverse. The under-representation of marine invertebrates