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 km² 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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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605324001066 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Biodiversity, renewable energy and maritime spatial planning in Europe: should offshore wind farms be located in marine protected areas?

European countries have committed to increase the area of ocean under protection to meet global and regional biodiversity targets, and also plan to expand offshore wind energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. But how can ambitious goals for nature and renewable energy be delivered in seas already heavily exploited for fisheries, shipping, tourism, oil and gas? EU policies encourage the colocation of activities, but is wind farm construction viable in marine protected areas?

These dilemmas are addressed in a discussion paper commissioned by the Renewables Grid Initiative (Stephenson, 2023, renewables-grid.eu/publications/offshore-colocation-discussion-paper.html). An assessment of the policy context, the status of marine protected areas and the impacts of wind energy on marine ecosystems produced several findings.

EU policies and directives allow wind farms to be constructed in Natura 2000 sites if significant disturbance can be avoided or if it is in the overriding public interest. National policies vary between allowing or banning wind farms in marine protected areas. Although wind farms may be less damaging than many other uses of the ocean, their construction, operation and decommissioning can cause habitat loss and harm wildlife through, for example, noise, pollution, invasive alien species and collisions with turbines, if mitigation measures are not taken. The reef effect (caused by adding solid substrates to the seabed), reserve effect (caused by restricting access to fishing vessels) and biodiversity enhancement (through nature-inclusive design of infrastructure) can increase the abundance of certain species in offshore wind farms, but the resultant communities differ from those found naturally. Colocating wind energy and marine protected areas is therefore risky for biodiversity conservation.

Many European marine protected areas lack management plans, objectives or IUCN management categories, and fail to protect nature because of their small size, weak enforcement of regulations, and inadequate restrictions on offtake. Only 1% of Europe's seas are strictly protected, well short of the 10% target.

Other human uses of the ocean, especially passive fishing, aquaculture, shipping and tourism, may provide more appropriate colocation opportunities with wind energy than marine protected areas, as demonstrated by wind farms, such as Borssele in the Netherlands, which have multiple-use zoning plans.

The discussion paper concludes that European states must improve the management and protection of marine protected areas. They also need to clarify the designation process for other area-based conservation measures and identify those that can enhance marine protected area connectivity. Opportunities for the colocation of offshore wind energy with non-conservation related activities should be optimized. Where wind farms and marine protected areas are already colocated, operators must optimize mitigation and conservation, monitor environmental impacts and share results. The key enabling condition for marine conservation and sustainable use is that EU Member States and their neighbours follow an ecosystem-based approach to data-driven maritime spatial planning that enhances renewable energy while not jeopardizing biodiversity.

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Collaborative national satellite event of World Species Congress for conservation in Indonesia

The first-ever World Species Congress, hosted by IUCN Reverse the Red, streamed globally for 24 hours on 15 May 2024. The main theme was celebrating success stories of conservation. As part of the Congress, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Republic of Indonesia, hosted a national satellite event—Pekan Keanekaragaman Hayati (Biodiversity Week)—on 15–17 May 2024, in Jakarta, supported by the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Indonesia Species Specialist Group and various partners, including corporations and NGOs.

The event celebrated the richness of Indonesia's biodiversity and highlighted the urgency of efforts to achieve the targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework, specifically Target 4 (halt extinctions and restore biodiversity). In talks, booths, mini games and performances, government agencies, companies and various organizations shared their efforts for species conservation. Over 7,000 participants attended in-person or online (from government, private sectors, schools, universities and the public), and the event was also broadcast on the Ministry of Environment and Forestry's YouTube channel (Kementerian LHK).

The first day commenced with a keynote speech by Alue Dohong, Vice Minister of Environment and Forestry,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605324001066 Published online by Cambridge University Press