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More Than 700 Threatened Species Remain Completely Unprotected, New Study Shows

Analysis of 11,000 Mammal, Amphibian and Bird Species Shows Major Gaps in Global Coverage

September 11, 2003 (Durban, South Africa) – At least 223 bird, 140 mammal and 346 amphibian species threatened with extinction currently have no protection whatsoever over any part of their ranges, according to the most comprehensive analysis of its kind of the world's protected area system.

In addition, many existing protected areas are so small in size as to be virtually ineffective in conserving species, placing another 943, and probably many more bird, mammal and amphibian species, at risk. Without an immediate and strategic expansion of the protected area system, scientists expect a major wave of extinctions within the next few decades.

The "global gap analysis" provides an overview of how well the world's species are covered by the global network of protected areas. The study was released by the Center for Applied Biodiversity Science (CABS) at Conservation International (CI) in a joint project with the IUCN-World Conservation Union's World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN/WCPA).

"This analysis clearly shows that there are severe gaps in the protected area system," said Gustavo Fonseca, CI's Executive Vice President for Programs and Science. "Nevertheless, by identifying the most urgent priorities that require protection and acting strategically and quickly, we still have a chance to save the vast majority of these species."

The analysis builds upon the work of thousands of scientists and dozens of institutions around the world. Based on their work, CABS scientists compared a map of all protected areas for which reliable information was available to maps of more than 11,000 species ranges from three species groups. They then identified places where species live without any protection, and analyzed where the highest priority gaps in protection existed. In total, 1,183 threatened bird species, and 4,734 mammal and 5,254 amphibian species, were included.

Tropical areas, specifically rainforests, and islands stood out as particular concerns for immediate conservation action. Of the areas identified as urgent priorities for the creation of new protected areas, fully 80% of the land area falls within the tropics. Islands, which

constitute only 5.2% of the planet's land surface, hold 45% of all species analyzed, of which more than half are endemics not found on continents.

“The single most effective way to conserve species is to maintain their natural habitats,” said Mohamed Bakarr, Vice President for Research for CABS at CI and Deputy Chair of IUCN/WCPA. “The results of this analysis must be used to identify those places on Earth where we need immediate protection. By doing so, we still stand a good chance of conserving these species.”

Of the 4,734 mammal species analyzed for this study, 260 are “gap species,” meaning that they have no protection over any part of their ranges. Of those, fully 54%, or 140, are threatened. Still, of the three groups studied, mammals have the best coverage, due in part to their larger average range size. Critically Endangered mammals currently unprotected include one of the rarest fruit bats in the world, the Comoro Black Flying Fox, (*Pteropus livingstonii*) found in the Comoros Islands in the Indian Ocean and the Handley's Slender Mouse Opossum (*Marmosa handleyi*) from Colombia.

Of the 5,254 amphibian species analyzed, 825 are gap species. Of those, 346 are threatened. As a group, amphibians have significantly less coverage than mammals or birds, mainly due to their small ranges, but also because they have received much less conservation action. Critically Endangered amphibians without current protection include the Bernhard's Mantella (*Mantella bernhardi*) from Madagascar and the Wuchuan Frog (*Rana wuchuanensis*) found only in a cave in Guizhou, China.

The world's 1,183 threatened bird species, mapped and assessed by BirdLife International, were also analysed, revealing 223 gap species. Though birds are the best-studied group, close to 20% of threatened species have absolutely no protection. The largest concentration of unprotected birds is found in the Andes and Indonesia. Critically Endangered bird species without current protection include the Yellow-eared Parrot, (*Ognorhynchus icterotis*) which has fewer than 150 known individuals remaining and is found only in the Colombian Andes, and the Caerulean Paradise-flycatcher, (*Eutrichomyias rowleyi*) of which less than 100 individuals are known to exist, only on Indonesia's Sangehe Island.

Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable are categories defined by IUCN for the assessment of each species' extinction risk, and published in the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*.

The analysis found that by adding a small percentage of the Earth's land area to the world's existing protected area system, a disproportionately large number of species could be brought into protection. For example, adding just 2.6% of the world's land area would bring approximately two-thirds of unprotected species into the protected area system. However, scientists urge caution in interpreting the results of the study.

“The global gap analysis should be regarded as a useful tool to guide the worldwide allocation of conservation spending, but cannot be regarded as the final word,” said Ana Rodrigues, Research Fellow with CABS at CI. “More detailed analyses using more comprehensive data will reveal numerous additional areas and species groups not highlighted by this study that also need urgent protection.”

“This global gap analysis reveals just how many of the most biodiverse areas are left without any protection,” says Dr Michael Rands, BirdLife International’s Director and Chief Executive. “Islands, especially those in tropical areas, warrant special attention for conservation action”.

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Maps and Photos Available to Journalists on Request from Conservation International. Images of relevant bird species available from BirdLife International.

*The protected area system map used data provided by the **World Database on Protected Areas Consortium**. Distribution maps for the three species groups used data provided through the **IUCN Red List partnership**.*

The Center For Applied Biodiversity Science (CABS) based at Conservation International, strengthens the ability of CI and other institutions to accurately identify and quickly respond to emerging threats to Earth's biological diversity. CABS brings together leading experts in science and technology to collect and interpret data about biodiversity, to develop strategic plans for conservation and to forge key partnerships in all sectors toward conservation goals. Read more about CABS at www.biodiversityscience.org.

WCPA's international mission is to promote the establishment and effective management of a worldwide representative network of terrestrial and marine protected areas, as an integral contribution to the IUCN mission.

For further information about the global gap analysis, visit www.conservation.org.

BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries who, together, are the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting bird life. For further information, please visit <http://www.birdlife.org>