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Backgrounder: Biodiversity conservation efforts working

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(This backgrounder supports the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) news release that was issued today.)

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A study released today by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provides evidence that biodiversity conservation efforts are effective around the world.

While the results are encouraging, Simon Fraser University associate biology professor Nick Dulvy says more can be done. He hopes those attending the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan, this week take notice.

'Conservation works but we're just not applying conservation efforts at the scale to halt and reverse biodiversity loss,' says Dulvy, who is also co-chair of the IUCN's shark specialist group.

According to the study, it is the most comprehensive assessment of the world's vertebrates (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish) and confirms an extinction crisis with one-fifth of species threatened. However, IUCN says the situation would be worse if it weren't for current global conservation efforts.

Some of the key conservation efforts detailed in the study are based in Canada.

'For example, the black-footed ferret is a small prairie dog-like animal that was extinct in Canada until it was reintroduced on October 9 last year,' says Dulvy. 'Twenty-four animals were reintroduced to Saskatchewan and they've shown signs of breeding and producing new pups this year. That's a reintroduction of biodiversity that was previously lost in Canada.'

'A more local example is the Vancouver Island marmot. This is a species found only there. There were quite substantial efforts in habitat management and conservation of the remaining animals has now secured some kind of future for this unique mammal. This species is now on an upward trajectory.'

The study, which will be published in the international journal, *Science*, used data for 25,000 species from The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species to investigate how the status of the world's vertebrates has changed over time. IUCN said 'the results show that, on average, 50 species of mammal, bird and amphibian move closer to extinction each year due to the impacts of agricultural expansion, logging, over-exploitation, and invasive alien species.'

Dulvy warns the downward trajectory of biodiversity loss will continue if the conservation actions highlighted in the IUCN study are not taken seriously by the international community. He believes conservationists need to have a strategic plan of action.

'The bottom line is that biodiversity underpins all the ecological services that you and I use day to day. Biodiversity produces the air you breathe, the water you drink, the food you eat, and a large part of the clothes that you wear. The question is where do we draw the line on biodiversity loss,' he says.

'Sure, we could probably survive without any individual mammal species or bird population or even plants, animals or fishes. The Nagoya conference is really about now is the time to draw the line on biodiversity loss and say it's a far too important life-support system for humanity to let go down the toilet.'

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'The study gives us a message of hope. It actually reminds us that there are large numbers of species that we bring back from the brink every year.'

IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental network with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists and experts in some 160 countries. For more information, visit www.iucn.org.