

Science for Environment Policy

Red List Index can measure conservation organisations' effectiveness

The IUCN's Red List Index (RLI) of threatened species can be used to measure the effectiveness of conservation organisations. This is according to a new study which used the index to assess an organisation's conservation impact on 17 species. Eight of these species saw improvements in their threat status, whereas 16 would have seen no improvement at all, or even deterioration, if there was no conservation action.

A huge amount of resources, time and effort are put into conservation practice and policy. Monitoring and evaluation of conservation efforts are necessary to ensure that these resources and efforts are effective in preserving [biodiversity](#), helping to set management and policy objectives and communicating results to stakeholders, such as governments, NGOs and the public.

However, there are few measures of conservation success applicable to all situations. As such, many conservation organisations have developed their own metrics for measuring their success based on their own specific goals and situation.

Aiming to address this lack of comparability, the study examined the practicality of using the RLI as a basis for evaluating the conservation effectiveness of individual agencies.

The [IUCN RLI](#) is a global approach to evaluating the conservation status and extinction risk of plant and animal species. It sets specific criteria for assessing the risk of extinction for thousands of plant and animal species, and categorises species into seven groups which range from 'Extinct' to of 'Least Concern'.

The researchers focused on the [Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust](#), which runs decades long conservation programmes in island ecosystems, such as on Madagascar. The researchers focused on 17 animals, including species of amphibians, birds and mammals, which were targeted by Durrell's conservation efforts between 1988 and 2012.

The method involved calculating the IUCN RLI index for each species over the time period and comparing this with an estimated 'no conservation' scenario. This allowed the researchers to determine trends in the impact of the conservation efforts.

Under the no conservation effort scenario, the researchers estimated that, by 2012, ten species would have remained in their 1988 RLI category, six would have deteriorated and only one is likely to have improved.

However, thanks to the Trust's actions, the actual RLI index for the 17 species saw a reduction in extinction risk for eight species. On average, there were around 16 years between the start of conservation efforts and the re-grading of a species to a lower level of threat.

The researchers concluded that the RLI is valuable as an indicator of an organisation's conservation success. However, they also report that unravelling the effects of different conservation groups and organisations who may work in partnership, or separately, in the same areas is very difficult. Thus, if the goal is to evaluate a single organisation, the approach is best suited to those which target either a small number of species or species with restricted distributions.



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