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For immediate release

Whale sharks, winghead sharks and Bornean orangutans slide towards extinction – IUCN Red List

Gland, Switzerland, 08 July 2016 (IUCN) – New IUCN Red List assessments reveal that growing human pressures on whale sharks, winghead sharks and Bornean orangutans are putting these species at an increasing risk of extinction. Whale sharks and winghead sharks are now listed as Endangered and Bornean orangutans as Critically Endangered – only one category away from Extinct.

“It is alarming to see such emblematic species slide towards extinction,” says **IUCN Director General, Inger Andersen**. “These new IUCN Red List assessments emphasise how urgent it is for the conservation community to act strategically to protect our planet’s incredible diversity of life. The world’s oceans and forests will only continue providing us with food and other benefits if we preserve their capacity to do so.”

Numbers of whale sharks ([Rhincodon typus](#)), the world’s largest living fish, have more than halved over the last 75 years as these slow-moving sharks continue being fished and killed by ship propellers.

Although conservation action in India, the Philippines and Taiwan has ended large-scale fishing of whale sharks in these countries, they continue to be fished in other locations, including southern China and Oman. As whale sharks and tuna are often present together, they are frequently caught by fishers targeting tuna.

“While international whale shark trade is regulated through the species’ listing on the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), more needs to be done domestically to protect whale sharks at a national level,” says **Simon Pierce lead Red List assessor, member of the IUCN SSC Shark Specialist Group, and co-founder of the Marine Megafauna Foundation**.

Unregulated fishing is also behind the fast falling numbers of the distinctive winghead shark ([Eusphya blochii](#)), whose morphology makes it extremely vulnerable to entanglement in fishing nets. This species of hammerhead shark has moved from Near Threatened to Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

Although it is difficult to say how many individuals remain, recent surveys of fish markets in Indonesia found only one winghead shark among approximately 20,000 sharks of other species. A similar pattern is expected throughout Asian countries where coastal fishing is intense and largely unregulated.

Another Red List assessment reveals that the Bornean orangutan ([Pongo pygmaeus](#)) has moved from Endangered to Critically Endangered – the highest risk category assigned by the IUCN Red List.

Bornean orangutan populations are declining as the forests they live in are turned into oil palm, rubber or paper plantations, and others are killed by humans.

“This is the first time in many decades that we have a clear understanding of Bornean orangutan population trends,” says **Erik Meijaard, one of the assessors of the species, member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission’s Primates Specialist Group and director of Borneo Futures** – an initiative dedicated to preserving Borneo’s biodiversity. “As orangutans are hunted and pushed out of their habitats, losses to this slow-breeding species are enormous and will be extremely difficult to reverse.”

A full update to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, including assessments of many other species, will be announced at the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2016 to be held in Hawai’i from 1 to 10

September.

The Congress is expected to see key decisions [on improving the governance of the high seas](#) under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and [mitigating the impacts of palm oil expansion](#), among other issues.

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Media registration for the IUCN Congress is free and can be accessed [here](#).

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About The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™ (or The IUCN Red List) is an invaluable resource to guide conservation action and policy decisions. It is a health check for our planet – a Barometer of Life. It is the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of plant, animal and fungi species. It is based on an objective system for assessing the risk of extinction of a species should no conservation action be taken.

Species are assigned to one of eight categories of threat based on whether they meet criteria linked to population trend, population size and structure and geographic range. Species listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable are collectively described as 'threatened'.

The IUCN Red List is not just a register of names and associated threat categories. It is a rich compendium of information on the threats to the species, their ecological requirements, where they live, and information on conservation actions that can be used to reduce or prevent extinctions. The IUCN Red List is a joint effort between IUCN and its Species Survival Commission, working with its IUCN Red List partners BirdLife International; Botanic Gardens Conservation International; Conservation International; NatureServe; Microsoft; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Sapienza University of Rome; Texas A&M University; Wildscreen; and Zoological Society of London.

www.iucnredlist.org <https://www.facebook.com/iucn.red.list> <https://twitter.com/IUCNRedList> <http://support.iucnredlist.org/>

About IUCN

IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges. IUCN's work focusses on valuing and conserving nature, ensuring effective and equitable governance of its use, and deploying nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development. IUCN supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world, and brings governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice. IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental organisation, with almost 1,300 government and NGO Members and more than 15,000 volunteer experts in 185 countries. IUCN's work is supported by almost 1,000 staff in 45 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world. www.iucn.org

About the Species Survival Commission

[The Species Survival Commission](#) (SSC) is the largest of IUCN's six volunteer commissions with a global membership of around 7,500 experts. SSC advises IUCN and its members on the wide range of technical and scientific aspects of species conservation, and is dedicated to securing a future for biodiversity. SSC has significant input into the international agreements dealing with biodiversity conservation.

About BirdLife

BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership. Together we are 120 BirdLife Partners worldwide – one per country – and growing, with almost 11 million supporters, 7,000 local conservation groups and 7,400 staff. Find out more at www.birdlife.org/ www.facebook.com/BirdLifeInternational

About Botanic Gardens Conservation International

BGCI is an international organisation that exists to ensure the world-wide conservation of threatened plants, the continued existence of which are intrinsically linked to global issues including poverty, human well-being and climate change. BGCI represents over 700 members – mostly botanic gardens – in 118 countries. We aim to support and empower our members and the wider conservation community so that their knowledge and expertise can be applied to reversing the threat of extinction crisis facing one third of all plants. <http://www.bgci.org>

About Conservation International (CI)

Building upon a strong foundation of science, partnership and field demonstration, CI empowers societies to responsibly and sustainably care for nature, our global biodiversity, for the long term well-being of people. Founded in 1987 and marking its 25th anniversary in 2012, CI has headquarters in the Washington DC area, and 900 employees working in nearly 30 countries on four continents, plus 1,000+ partners around the world. For more information, please visit us at www.conservation.org, or follow us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential. <http://www.microsoft.com>

About NatureServe

NatureServe is a non-profit conservation organisation dedicated to providing the scientific basis for effective conservation action.

THE IUCN RED LIST OF THREATENED SPECIES™



Through its network of 82 natural heritage programmes and conservation data centres in the United States, Canada, and Latin America, NatureServe provides a unique body of detailed scientific information and conservation biodiversity expertise about the plants, animals, and ecosystems of the Americas. www.natureserve.org

About the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is a world-famous scientific organisation, internationally respected for its outstanding living collection of plants and world-class Herbarium as well as its scientific expertise in plant diversity, conservation and sustainable development in the UK and around the world. Kew Gardens is a major international visitor attraction. Its landscaped 132 hectares and RBG Kew's country estate, Wakehurst Place, attract nearly two million visitors every year. Kew was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2003 and celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2009. Wakehurst Place is home to Kew's Millennium Seed Bank, the largest wild plant seed bank in the world. RBG Kew and its partners have collected and conserved seed from 10 percent of the world's wild flowering plant species (c.30,000 species). The aim is to conserve 25 percent by 2020, and its enormous potential for future conservation can only be fulfilled with the support of the public and other funders. www.kew.org

About Sapienza University of Rome

With over 700 years of history and 145,000 students, Sapienza is the largest University in Europe, the second in the world after El Cairo, a city within the city. The University includes 11 faculties and 67 departments. In Sapienza there are over 4,500 professors, and 5,000 administrative and technical staff. Sapienza offers a wide choice of courses including 300 degree programmes and 200 specialized qualifications. Students coming from other regions are over 30,000 and the foreign students are over 7,000. Sapienza plans and carries out important scientific investigations in almost all disciplines, achieving high-standard results both on a national and on an international level. Professor Luigi Frati has been the Rector of Sapienza University since November 2008. <http://www.uniroma1.it/>

About Texas A&M University

From humble beginnings in 1876 as Texas' first public institution of higher learning, to a bustling 5,200-acre campus with a nationally recognized faculty, Texas A&M University is one of a select few universities with land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant designations. With an enrolment of about half men and half women, 25 percent of the freshman class are the first in their family to attend college. Here, 39,000-plus undergraduates and more than 9,400 graduate students have access to world-class research programs and award-winning faculty. Texas A&M has two branch campuses, one in Galveston, Texas, and one in the Middle Eastern country of Qatar. This research-intensive flagship university with 10 colleges was recently ranked first in the nation by *Smart Money* magazine for "pay-back ratio" (what graduates earn compared to the cost of their education). The 2011 *U.S. News and World Report* ranked Texas A&M second nationally in their "Great Schools, Great Prices" category among public universities and 22nd overall. Many degree programmes are ranked among the top 10 in the country. www.tamu.edu

About Wildscreen

Wildscreen is an award-winning wildlife conservation charity that shares awe-inspiring images of life on Earth to empower conservation around the world. It achieves its mission through its four interconnected initiatives - Wildscreen Arkive, Wildscreen Exchange, Wildscreen Festivals and Wildscreen Outreach. Founded in 1982, Wildscreen inspires photographers and filmmakers to take the most vital images, uses those images to inspire the next generation of conservationists online and in their communities, and arms conservation organisations around the world with them — so their all-important stories have the best chance of being seen and heard. <http://www.wildscreen.org>

About the Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

Founded in 1826, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity: the key role is the conservation of animals and their habitats. The Society runs ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo, carries out scientific research at the Institute of Zoology and is actively involved in field conservation in over 50 countries worldwide. www.zsl.org