

UNH's Fred Short adds seagrass data to major conservation study

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A major new study that sounds a conservation alarm for the world's vertebrate species notes that the world's seagrass species are faring somewhat better, says a University of New Hampshire researcher who was a coauthor of the study.

Fred Short, UNH research professor of natural resources and director of the worldwide program SeagrassNet, was among the 174 scientists who contributed to "The Impact of Conservation on the Status of the World's [Vertebrates](#)," released online this week in the journal *Science*.

"Some areas, including New Hampshire, are experiencing serious loss of seagrass distribution," says Short, "but that is different than experiencing loss of a given [species](#), which is what the Red List process evaluates."

The survey focused primarily on vertebrate species, finding that 20 percent of the vertebrates reviewed are classified as "threatened" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and an average of 52 species of mammals, birds and amphibians move one category closer to [extinction](#) each year. In addition, the article included three plant groups.

"Inclusion of these plant groups -- seagrasses, cycads and conifers -- gives a context for what's happening with vertebrates by looking at other organismal distribution," says Short. "Plant species provide habitat and food for vertebrates."

Short, who is the IUCN Red List Authority focal point for seagrasses, led a three-year assessment of the world's seagrass species for conservation status. He notes that 14 percent of seagrass species are in threatened categories based on the [Red List](#). "We're polluting our oceans and coastal areas tremendously," he says. "We are most certainly losing seagrass distribution, and at present 10 of the world's 72 seagrass species are threatened. The trends are not encouraging."

The *Science* paper, whose lead author is Michael Hoffman of the IUCN, emphasizes that its concerning findings should not obscure the impact of conservation efforts, without which species losses would have been 20 percent higher. "Nonetheless, current [conservation](#) efforts remain insufficient to offset the main drivers of biodiversity loss in these groups: agricultural expansion, logging, over-exploitation, and invasive alien species," the authors write.

Short adds that the same drivers affecting vertebrates, along with coastal development, are also threatening seagrasses in the coastal oceans.

More information: For an abstract of the *Science* paper, go to [www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content ... ract/science.1194442](http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content...ract/science.1194442)
To learn more about SeagrassNet, go to www.seagrassnet.org

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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