

Wildlife Conservation Society releases list of Asian species at the conservation crossroads

September 5 2012



This is an extremely rare still of a kouprey, from the only known footage of this extinct species, once native to Southeast Asia. Credit: Wildlife Conservation Society

Will the tiger go the way of the passenger pigeon or be saved from extinction like the American bison?

The [Wildlife Conservation Society](#) (WCS) today released a list of Asian [species](#) that are at a conservation crossroads calling for governments to take immediate action with The Three R's Approach: Recognition, Responsibility, Recovery.

The list includes: the tiger, [orangutans](#), Mekong giant catfish, Asian [rhinos](#), Asian giant river turtles, and Asian vultures. The announcement

was made at the IUCN's World Conservation Congress convening in Jeju, South Korea through Sept. 13.

WCS says that each species can follow the path of the passenger pigeon, which went extinct in the early 20th century, or the bison, which was saved using the 'three R's' approach. In the case of the bison, which was decimated by overhunting, its plight was recognized, responsibility was taken, and recovery resulted with more than 30,000 wild individuals in existence today. WCS was directly involved in saving the bison by breeding animals in the [Bronx Zoo](#) and working with partners to reintroduce them into protected areas in the early 1900s.

"As in the United States, it will not be the species themselves deciding which fork to take, but actions of humans using the three R's: recognition, responsibility and recovery – recognizing the problem, taking responsibility for solving it, and putting species back on the path to recovery," said WCS President and CEO Dr. Cristián Samper.

Though each Asian species on the list faces daunting challenges from a variety of factors including [habitat loss](#), and illegal hunting and trade, WCS believes that Asian governments have the ability – and financial means – to turn the tide on extinction.

The tiger is an example of a species that could be going the way of the bison, at least in some locations, according to WCS. India took responsibility for the tiger when it announced Project Tiger in 1972. By doing so it sent a clear message that the fate of the wild tiger was in its hands and India alone would be held accountable for their future. This almost unprecedented commitment led to one of the few examples of a major Asian species undertaking a sustained recovery. Today, while problems and challenges remain, India remains committed to ensuring that tigers are conserved effectively within its boundaries. Similarly, in the Western Forest Complex in Thailand, the Thai Government is taking

responsibility for protecting its tigers by taking bold steps to overcome the poaching pressures.

Other species, such as the orangutan, face a bleaker future with widespread conversion of its habitat into palm oil plantations that have decimated wild populations. Asian rhinos and giant river turtles face relentless poaching pressure for the illegal wildlife trade, while Asian [vultures](#) have been nearly wiped out due to poisoning. Mekong giant catfish numbers have plummeted due to overfishing

WCS warns that time is running out for Asia's wildlife, noting that two large mammal species – the kouprey, a type of wild cattle once found in Southeast Asia, and a Chinese freshwater dolphin species called a baiji – have gone extinct.

More information: www.wcs.org/

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

Citation: Wildlife Conservation Society releases list of Asian species at the conservation crossroads (2012, September 5) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-wildlife-society-asian-species-crossroads.html>

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