



COMMITTEE ON THE
STATUS OF ENDANGERED
WILDLIFE IN CANADA

COMITÉ SUR LA SITUATION
DES ESPÈCES EN PÉRIL
AU CANADA

Once common, now disappearing: Wood Turtle and Olive-sided Flycatcher focus attention on Species at Risk.

The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) met in Ottawa, Ontario, November 28-30, 2007 where the conservation status of 15 species was assessed. This is the 30th year of work by the Committee.

Stomping Turtle in trouble

Wood Turtles can live for several decades along forested creeks and rivers from the Maritimes west to Ontario. This species was assessed as Threatened due partly to the loss of habitat and increased road mortality. These turtles stomp their feet to attract earthworms. A victim of its attractive appearance and tameness, turtles are the focus of illegal harvesting.

Collectors also represent a threat to another reptile, the Eastern Hog-nosed snake, contributing to an assessment of Threatened. Individuals wander widely and are commonly killed on roads. This non-venomous species has a tendency to inflate its neck to a cobra-like hood, hiss, strike, and eventually feign death. These snakes are fast disappearing from southern Ontario.

More unexplained bird declines

The Olive-sided Flycatcher, a species found across Canada, was assessed as Threatened because of a long-term decline in numbers. Similar to some other recently assessed birds that feed on flying insects and winter in South America, the cause of the decline is unclear.

Fisheries management pays dividends

The Canary Rockfish is harvested along the West Coast of North America. The species declined drastically as a result of fishing pressure. The overall decline led COSEWIC to assess the species as Threatened. However, improvements in the way the fishery is managed, including observer coverage and the novel use of video records, have reduced the risk that the species will become endangered.

Endangered seals

Canada's only freshwater seal, the Lac des Loups Marins subspecies of the Harbour seal, now estimated to number only about a hundred individuals, is considered Endangered.

Botanical bottlenecks

Three perennial plants were all assessed as Endangered. The Wood-poppy is restricted to 3 small and highly fragmented populations in SW Ontario. The Golden Paintbrush and the Yellow Montane Violet both occur in a few scattered locations on southern Vancouver Island and adjacent islands. These plants are all impacted by habitat loss and the spread of invasive aliens.

Disappearing sand dune ecosystems

The Committee assessed the status of two prairie sand dune moths, the Dusky Dune Moth and Pale Yellow Dune Moth. The dusky species, which is associated with disappearing active dunes was assessed as Endangered, while the status of Special Concern was assigned to the pale yellow species which lives in sparsely vegetated semi-stabilized dunes. These moths join a variety of other dune-inhabiting plants and animals at risk of extinction. A working group is partnering with researchers to prepare a report about on-going changes to prairie dune ecosystems.

About COSEWIC

COSEWIC assesses the national status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other important units of biological diversity, that are considered to be at risk in Canada. To do so, COSEWIC uses scientific, Aboriginal traditional and local or community knowledge provided by many experts from governments, academia, other organizations and individuals. Assessment summaries are currently available to the public on the COSEWIC website (www.cosewic.gc.ca) and will be submitted to the Federal Minister of the Environment in August 2008 for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). At that time, the full status reports will be publicly available on the Species at Risk Public Registry (www.sararegistry.gc.ca).

There are now 556 species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including 225 Endangered, 141 Threatened, 155 Special Concern, and 22 Extirpated Species (i.e. no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition, 13 are Extinct and 43 are Data Deficient.

COSEWIC comprises members from each provincial and territorial government wildlife agency, four federal entities (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Federal Biodiversity Information Partnership, chaired by the Canadian Museum of Nature), three non-government science members, and the co-chairs of the species specialist and the Aboriginal traditional knowledge subcommittees.

Definition of COSEWIC terms and risk categories:

Wildlife Species: A species, subspecies, variety, or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and is either native to Canada or has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.

Extinct (X): A wildlife species that no longer exists

Extirpated (XT): A wildlife species no longer existing in the wild in Canada, but occurring elsewhere

Endangered (E): A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction

Threatened (T): A wildlife species likely to become Endangered if limiting factors are not reversed

Special Concern (SC): A wildlife species that may become a Threatened or an Endangered species because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats

Not at Risk (NAR): A wildlife species that has been evaluated and found to be not at risk of extinction given the current circumstances

Data Deficient (DD): A category that applies when the available information is insufficient (a) to resolve a wildlife species' eligibility for assessment or (b) to permit an assessment of the wildlife species' risk of extinction.

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Further details on all species assessed, and the reasons for designations, can be found on the COSEWIC website at:

www.cosewic.gc.ca