

# IUCN red list reveals wildlife destruction from treetop to ocean floor

Latest list shows extinction now threatens a third of all assessed species, from monkeys to rhino rays

**Damian Carrington** *Environment editor, The Guardian* Thu 18 Jul 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jul/18/iucn-red-list-reveals-wildlife-destruction-from-treetop-to-ocean-floor>

From the tops of trees to the depths of the oceans, humanity's destruction of wildlife is continuing to drive many species towards extinction, with the latest "red list" showing that a third of all species assessed are under threat.

The razing of habitats and hunting for bushmeat has now driven seven primates into decline, while overfishing has pushed two families of extraordinary rays to the brink. Pollution, dams and over-abstraction of freshwater are responsible for serious declines in river wildlife from Mexico to Japan, while illegal logging is ravaging Madagascar's rosewoods, and disease is decimating the American elm.

The [red list](#), produced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), is the most authoritative assessment of the status of species. The list published on Thursday adds almost 9,000 new species, bringing the total to 105,732, though this is a fraction of the millions of species thought to live on Earth. Not a single species was recorded as having improved in status.

A landmark [planetary health check](#) published in May concluded that human civilisation was in jeopardy from the accelerating decline of the Earth's natural life-support systems. [Wildlife populations have plunged by 60% since 1970](#) and [plant extinctions are running at a "frightening" rate](#), according to scientists.

"Nature is declining at rates unprecedented in human history," said Jane Smart, director of the IUCN biodiversity conservation group. She said decisive action was needed to halt the decline, with next year's UN biodiversity convention summit in China seen as crucial.

The red list highlights the plight of wedgefishes and giant guitarfishes, known as rhino rays because of their elongated snouts. They are now the most imperilled marine fish families in the world, with all but one of the 16 species critically endangered – meaning they are one step from extinction. Intensified and unregulated fishing is to blame, with the rays usually snared as bycatch.

Among the seven primate species pushed closer to extinction, six are in west Africa where deforestation and bushmeat hunting is rife. There are now just 2,000 Roloway monkeys left in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, meaning their population is precariously small. Their relatively large body size and the value of their meat and skin have made them a preferred [target](#) for hunters.

Humanity's thirst for fresh water, particularly for farming, is having an especially big impact on river and lake wildlife. The red list update reveals that more than half of the freshwater fish in Japan and over a third in Mexico are now threatened with extinction. Recent research found [two-thirds of the world's great rivers no longer flow freely](#).

"The loss of these freshwater fish species would deprive billions of people of a critical source of food and income, and could have knock-on effects on entire ecosystems," said William Darwall, head of the IUCN freshwater biodiversity unit.

The red list update also added 500 deep-sea bony fish species, such as bioluminescent lanternfishes, which face potential threats from deep-fishing, oil and gas drilling and seabed mining. The scaly-foot snail is the first mollusc that lives on deep-sea hydrothermal vents to be added to the list and is assessed as endangered.

The IUCN has new assessments for most of the dry forest trees in Madagascar, including 23 rosewood and palissander species, and it finds that 90% are threatened. Their wood is prized for furniture and is the [world's most illegally trafficked wild product](#). The American elm has entered the red list for the first time as endangered. The once common tree has declined over decades due to an invasive [fungal](#) pathogen, Dutch elm disease.

"Invasive diseases, together with air pollution and climate change, have decimated populations of numerous North American tree species that once provided abundant food for native wildlife, as well scenic beauty," said Healy Hamilton, at NatureServe, a network of biodiversity scientists.

Fungi are a growing feature of the list, with the update revealing that at least 15 species that grow in the traditional countryside of many European countries are now threatened with extinction. The bright red splendid waxcap, found in the UK and Germany, is one which has suffered as semi-natural grasslands have been converted to intensive agriculture.

Other species added include the Hungarian birch mouse, now extinct in 98% of its former range due to intensive farming, and the Lake Oku puddle frog, once the most abundant frog at Lake Oku in Cameroon but possibly extinct due to a [devastating fungus that has ravaged amphibians](#) around the world.

"Loss of species and climate change are the two great challenges facing humanity this century," said Lee Hannah at [Conservation International](#). The red list addresses both, he said, by including the threat of global heating in the assessment of extinction risk. "The results are clear, we must act now on both."