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## Bolstering Biodiversity: Kenya Species Specialist Group Emerges at Inaugural Wildlife Scientific Conference

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Biodiversity in Kenya has today received a boost with the establishment of the IUCN Kenya Species Specialist Group (KeSSG) announced on the second day of the inaugural Wildlife Scientific Conference hosted by the Wildlife Research & Training Institute (WRTI) in Naivasha, Kenya. The announcement was officiated by the Principal Secretary, State Department for Wildlife Silvia Museiya who stated, "Congratulations on this collective approach in place of siloed efforts."

This action comes as part of a collaborative agreement between WRTI and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The KeSSG aims to bring together experts working on different taxonomic groups from across the country, pooling their expertise to inform policies and decisions that will help reverse the decline of species.

Dr. Patrick Omondi, the Director and CEO of WRTI, expressed his support for this groundbreaking initiative, stating, "The KeSSG will be a powerhouse of knowledge and expertise, uniting specialists from various disciplines to drive evidence-based conservation efforts. It's a significant step forward in safeguarding Kenya's rich biodiversity."

The KeSSG is a pioneering venture under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's [Species Survival Commission](#) (SSC), designed to promote collaborative efforts among diverse Specialist Groups globally. These groups harness the knowledge of national experts to tackle the challenges posed by biodiversity loss and emerging sustainability issues. This critical information contributes to the widely-regarded [IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#). The KeSSG will form part of an 8,500-strong network of specialists comprising 184 specialist groups globally.

Luther Anukur, the Regional Director of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, highlighted the importance of this initiative, stating, "The KeSSG marks a milestone for Kenya to draw on a huge body of science to inform conservation policy and practice. By bringing these experts together, we are enhancing our capacity to protect and preserve the unique species that call Kenya home." marks a milestone

The KeSSG will follow IUCN Regional/National guidelines to assess the conservation status of priority species in Kenya, train members and stakeholders, and develop and implement species action plans in line with the strategic plans of Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and Wildlife Research and Training Institution (WRTI).

Dr. Simmy Bezeg, Regional Red List and Key Biodiversity Area Programme Officer - IUCN Species Survival Commission, emphasised the significance of the KeSSG's formation, stating, "This initiative represents a collaborative approach to species conservation. Through this, we can further develop holistic strategies that address the complex challenges faced by our diverse wildlife and in turn, share our knowledge and learn from a global network of species experts."

The KeSSG will be co-chaired by key government agencies responsible for biodiversity conservation, the Wildlife Research and Training Institute and the National Museums of Kenya, and supported by the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute (KMFRI), Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and other stakeholders. These agencies play a pivotal role in ensuring the sustainable conservation of Kenya's natural resources.

Key activities of the Kenya Species Specialist Group include:

- Complete global Red List assessments for selected species not yet on the IUCN Red List.
- Conduct national Red List assessments for priority wildlife and socio-economically important species.
- Promote and contribute to the development and implementation of existing species conservation action plans.
- Publish species assessments on authorised platforms to support decision-making.
- Support the integration of species information into development sector planning and national strategies.
- Promote integration of species information and conservation actions into national and county level policy processes

The collaboration between IUCN and WRTI, highlighted by the establishment of the KeSSG, demonstrates a shared commitment to advancing global biodiversity conservation efforts. This initiative is a significant stride towards achieving a more sustainable and harmonious coexistence between humanity and the natural world.

#### **About WRTI**

The Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI) is a state Corporation established under Section 50 of the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act No. 47 of 2013 (WCMA 2013). WRTI headquarters are in Naivasha, Kenya. It has field centres and sub-centres in key wildlife conservation areas across the country established to address specific agro-climatic research thematic areas.

#### **About IUCN**

IUCN is a membership Union composed of both government and civil society organisations. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its more than 1,400 Member organisations and the input of more than 15,000 experts. IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it.

#### **About the IUCN Species Survival Commission**

With over 8,500 volunteer experts, the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) work independently and with the different IUCN Units to build knowledge on the status of species and threats to them and to provide advice, develop policies and guidelines and facilitate conservation planning. Through this work, SSC catalyses conservation action and enables IUCN to influence policy and assist societies in biodiversity conservation.

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