



**GLOBAL
WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION**



**THE SEARCH FOR
LOST SPECIES**
A CAMPAIGN OF GLOBAL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

FAQ

The Search for Lost Species

What makes a species “lost?”

There is no international standard that defines what constitutes a “lost” species, or a rediscovery, and the criteria varies by taxa. We relied on experts from more than 100 IUCN Species Survival Commission Specialist Groups to nominate species they considered lost based on criteria they proposed for the taxa. At minimum, a species had to have been lost to science (unseen by scientists) for at least a decade for it to make it on our full list of nominations.

How did these species become lost?

Species become lost for a variety of reasons. In some cases, species that once existed in healthy populations are now possibly extinct as the result of any number of threats, including emerging disease, habitat destruction, invasive species introduction, poaching and human-wildlife conflict. In some cases, scientists haven’t had access to the species because they are in hard-to-reach wilderness or conflict-ridden regions. And in some cases these species were very rare to begin with, existing in small numbers in small geographical areas where a single disturbance could easily wipe out the entire population. In addition, some species are incredibly cryptic, either due to their behavior or life history.

How did you select the top 25 “most wanted” species?

We wanted to ensure that our top 25 “most wanted” species spanned taxa and represented ecosystems across the planet, including land- and water-dwelling species. Our top 25 “most wanted” species includes 10 mammals, three birds, three reptiles, two amphibians, three fish, one insect, one crustacean, one coral and even one plant, and are found in 18 countries. The top 25 “most wanted” species also includes at least seven species that are associated with unverified reports in the last 20 years suggesting they may still be out there (Miss Waldron’s Red Colobus, New Zealand Greater Short-tailed Bat, Attenborough’s Long-beaked Echidna, Ilin Island Cloudburrower, Omiltemi Cottontail Rabbit, Pink-headed Duck, Scarlet Harlequin Frog). In some cases, the rediscovery of one of the top 25 species could have tremendous scientific significance (the rediscovery of the Scarlet Harlequin Frog, for example, could help scientists better understand resistance to chytrid, the fungal pathogen killing frogs worldwide) or cultural significance.

Most importantly, our top 25 “most wanted” species are flagships for conservation and represent genuine opportunities for conservation action with local partners on the ground (or in the water, as the case may be).

Q. Do you think you’ll find any of the species on your top 25 list?

We really don’t know what to expect. Some of these species are known only from a single specimen (Wondiwoi Tree Kangaroo, Namdapha Flying Squirrel, Attenborough’s Long-beaked Echidna, Ilin Island Cloudburrower, Fernandina Galapagos Tortoise, Velvet Pitcher Plant). The Bullneck Seahorse has actually never been seen in the wild. However, there is unsubstantiated evidence from local communities that some of these species may still be out there. And if there’s any one theme for this initiative, it’s hope.

Hope that maybe, by some chance, these species are still out there. Hope that once we rediscover them, we'll be able to conserve them, along with the species that share their habitats. Most conservationists will say that hope is what drives them, against all odds. That's what this initiative is all about.

Q. What happens if you don't find any of the species on the top 25 list?

We certainly hope, for the sake of these species, that this isn't the case. However, as we embark on these expeditions, we'll be learning about the habitats these species once called home and will be looking for conservation opportunities even if we discover that the flagship species is no longer there.

The top 25 flagship species represent only a fraction of the more than 1,200 species that scientists and conservationists from around the world nominated, and for now, are the targets of our continued fundraising efforts. However, as this initiative grows, we will be adding expeditions and working with partners to find additional lost species. In some cases, the flagship species actually share habitat with other nominated lost species, so we'll be looking for those animals or plants, too, and reporting back.

Q. After a species is rediscovered, then what?

First we celebrate. Then we get to work with local and international partners on developing the best conservation strategies for this species, its habitat, and the species it shares its home with. This could involve working with communities to protect it, when appropriate establishing a new protected area, understanding how a species has survived and applying that knowledge to help other species, working with local governments to enact laws that protect species, etc. The conservation strategy will depend on the natural history of the species, its habitat and the threats causing it harm.

Q. Has any organization ever done anything like this before?

In 2010, our conservation scientists launched a global Search for Lost Frogs, a joint GWC partnership with Conservation International. GWC Communications Director Robin Moore, then at Conservation International, was leading the team, which included GWC President Dr. Don Church, GWC Associate Scientist Nikki Roach, and other GWC team members. The project was supported by various sources such as the US Fish & Wildlife Service, and GWC scientists participated in expeditions. The team developed a list of lost frog that developed into an entire campaign that involved sending groups of scientists out into various habitats around the world to try to find the "most wanted" frog species. We're replicating the success of that project across taxa in the Search for Lost Species. Other groups, such as BirdLife International, have ongoing expeditions to look for specific bird species, but no other organization has launched an initiative to look for this many lost species across taxa throughout such a wide geographical range of ecosystems.

Q. How can I get involved?

There are lots of ways to get involved! You can help by making a donation to support the expeditions; by following (and sharing!) the Search for Lost Species on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#); or by signing up at <http://lostspecies.org> to receive updates. If you're part of a corporation, we'd love to talk to you about our [corporate sponsorship opportunities](#) for the Search for Lost Species. The global search begins at <http://lostspecies.org/>.