

IS IT POSSIBLE TO PREPARE RELIABLE RED LISTS IN MEGADIVERSE COUNTRIES?

Theme: Biodiversity conservation indicators

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Red listing in megadiverse countries like Brazil faces not only the challenge of assessing the conservation status of a huge number of species, but also many problems related to red listing in general, including the generally small proportion of taxonomic groups assessed, the generally small proportion of species assessed in each group, the lack of knowledge on the biology and distribution of many species, and problems related to the methodology used in red listing. Regarding the small proportion of groups assessed, this problem is insurmountable even in the long term, mainly because some groups are extremely diverse and/or the number of researchers studying them is small. The lack of knowledge on most species will not be surmounted in the short term, but at least for some groups, there was a significant increase in the rate of publication of new data for many species in the last decades. Earlier Brazilian red lists were almost always prepared through the assessment of a list of candidate species; consequently, most species remained unassessed. Experience shows that when all species within a given group are assessed, a relatively large number of species which were not candidates appear as endangered. Thus, besides setting the starting point for Red List Indexes (which show the trend in the conservation status of a given group by comparing assessments made at different times), results of complete assessments are considerably more reliable than those based on candidate lists. At least for relatively well known groups like most vertebrates and some groups of plants and invertebrates, it is feasible to assess all species, provided enough time is available. For instance, regarding diverse groups (> 100 spp.), a complete assessment of the Brazilian amphibians (about 900 spp.) is in course, and complete assessments are planned for snakes, lizards, and amphisbaenians (about 690 spp.). For each of these groups, the total assessment will be completed in at least two years. Finally, problems related to the methodology used for building red lists may be solved with relative ease. For instance, the recent assessment workshops held in Brazil are being preceded by training in the IUCN methodology and the results of workshops will be reviewed by red list authorities (people trained by IUCN to validate the use of categories and criteria). In conclusion, at least for some groups, the forthcoming red lists in Brazil will be much more reliable than those prepared in the past.