



IUCN SSC Wildlife Health Specialist Group: 2017-2020 Action Plan

The Wildlife Health Specialist Group (WHSG) is commissioned to serve as a first response for wildlife health concerns relevant to conservation around the world. As a disciplinary group we are equipped to provide information to other species and cross-cutting Specialist Groups, and also seek to serve the wider conservation health community, especially in countries with specific disease concerns. The information we compile may also be relevant to other communities (e.g. public health authorities that may benefit from sentinel event detection in wildlife).

This action plan builds on our work from the prior quadrennium (2013-2016), which includes response to disease-specific events, as well as policy action and information dissemination. Our network of 300+ expert members around the world helps mobilize expertise and information to inform key and often urgent local and international decision making. Examples of our ongoing **species-specific engagement** include investigation of and response to the Saiga antelope mass mortality events in Kazakhstan (2015) and PPR epidemic amongst wild ruminants including saiga in Mongolia (2017), issuing recommendations on rabies control measures for the critically-endangered Ethiopian wolf, information gathering on cetacean mortality events, and synthesis of findings around amphibian chytrid fungus. We frequently highlight further data needs for undiagnosed wildlife morbidity and mortality events, as well as compile and share guidance resources that may assist conservation managers in their surveillance and disease investigation activities.

We tackle **threats to wildlife health**, such as accidental or intentional poisoning (e.g., severe vulture declines in South Asia from ingestion of the veterinary pharmaceutical Diclofenac) and ongoing concerns around ecotoxicologies with agricultural chemicals and veterinary drugs in African wildlife including vultures. We also promote **effective management of wildlife disease** to reduce detrimental impacts on already-threatened species. Wildlife disease is increasingly recognized as highly pertinent to the conservation of vulnerable and threatened species, especially as species population sizes increasingly face other pressures such as habitat loss and overexploitation (e.g. for wildlife trade). As the direct or underlying cause of wildlife morbidity and mortality events may not always be readily apparent, access to diagnostic services is essential for conservation management. We work with the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to assist countries in the timely international movement of emergency diagnostic specimens for conservation purposes. We also identify opportunities to apply the IUCN-OIE Guidelines for Wildlife Disease Risk Analysis to help **anticipate and more proactively reduce risks** (for conservation as well as the protection of ecological, agricultural and human health).

Finally, through our work with partners at the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and World Health Organization, and UNEP we also elucidate the myriad links between biodiversity, environment and health and solutions that can be informed by 'One Health' approaches that consider connections between human, animal and environmental health. Health provides a major avenue for 'mainstreaming' of biodiversity and ecosystems. WHSG is also informed through close links with the OIE, FAO and International Wildlife Disease Association and other national wildlife health or disease agencies and associations.