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The Florida scrub-jay joins the IUCN green list

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A banded Florida scrub-jay, part of the study population at Archbold Biological Station.

COURTESY/DR. ANGELA TRINGALI

VENUS — Archbold scientists Dr. Angela Tringali and Dr. Raoul Boughton joined over 200

scientists to test a new way of measuring conservation success. Tringali says, “Historically, there has been emphasis on quantifying threats to rare plants and animals. It is very important to identify which species are at-risk of extinction and take steps to protect them, but that should be accompanied with an assessment of the impact of those actions.”

The research paper ‘Testing a global standard for quantifying species recovery and assessing conservation impact’ was published in the July issue of the journal Conservation Biology. The paper focuses on the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) new ‘Green Status of Species.’

The original Red List of Threatened Species was established by the ICUN in 1964 and is a list of animal, plant and fungus species and their respective conservation status. There are currently more than 134,400 species worldwide on this list, with nearly 30% of them categorized as threatened with extinction. In 2012, the IUCN started developing a ‘Green List of Species,’ which has evolved into the IUCN Green Status of Species. This list proposes a standardized method to determine current species recovery status and application of that method to estimate past and potential future impacts of conservation based on several metrics. The ‘Green Status of Species’ is meant to be an assessment tool for conservation and does not have any state or federal regulatory implications.

Said the paper’s lead author, Dr. Molly Grace of the University of Oxford: “The IUCN Red List tells us how close a species is to extinction but is not intended to paint a full picture of its status and functioning within its ecosystem. With the IUCN Green Status, we now have a complementary tool that allows us to track species recovery and dramatically improve our understanding of the state of the world’s wildlife. The IUCN Green Status of Species provides evidence that conservation works, giving cause for optimism and impetus for stronger action.”

The paper outlines the preliminary assessments of the first 181 IUCN Green Status, including one for the Florida Scrub-Jay. Dr. Angela Tringali, of Archbold’s Avian Ecology Program and Dr. Raoul Boughton, Archbold Research Affiliate, completed the Green Status Assessment for Florida Scrub-Jays. They used information about historic and ongoing threats and conservation actions to compare the current status of Florida scrub-jays with an estimate of population size had no conservation action been taken. “Comparing the current status of Florida scrub-jays to what their populations would look like without conservation was heartening,” Tringali said. “The assessment made it clear that previous and ongoing conservation efforts are working. The jays would be worse off had nothing been done.”

“Florida scrub-jays are a conservation-dependent species,” notes Dr. Reed Bowman, director of Archbold’s Avian Ecology Program, “and the Green Status assessment highlights that one of the biggest threats to Florida scrub-jays is inadequate habitat management. Jays depend on frequent fire to maintain low and open habitat. Fragmentation and habitat conversion has reduced the spread of natural fires; thus, jays are wholly dependent on periodic prescribed burning to maintain their habitat, which would rapidly disappear without fire.”

Boughton emphasizes, “The rapid growth of human populations is increasingly being felt by species worldwide. To be involved in the assessment of the Green Status of Species using the threatened Florida scrub-jay was a daunting and very fulfilling task. The Green Status of Species has developed an international standard for measuring the effectiveness of conservation actions using a science-based metric. It provides a well thought out tool for planning and evaluating the efforts of conservation. To me the tool provides a measurable way forward for each species, creating positive action-based management rather than doom and gloom, even for critically endangered species.”

“The Green Status of Species provides a rigorous science-based measure of how far conservation efforts are working. It will allow conservationists, governments, and others to see over time what a particular species needs, how it can recover fully, and how much it depends on conservation action now and in the future to thrive,” says Dr. Elizabeth Bennett, vice president of Species Conservation for the Wildlife Conservation Society. Dr. Hilary Swain, Archbold director, added, “Archbold is pleased to have contributed our knowledge of Florida Scrub-Jays to evaluating this tool and we look forward to exploring its use to assess the positive impacts of the extensive public and private efforts to protect all the other threatened and endangered species associated with the Florida scrub ecosystem, both regionally and statewide.”

