



**COSEWIC**  
Committee on the Status of  
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

**COSEPAC**  
Comité sur la situation des  
espèces en péril au Canada

## Canadian wildlife continue to struggle

The list of Canadian wildlife species at risk continues to grow. The status of 36 species, including 10 not previously examined, was assessed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), during its meeting in Ottawa, November 23<sup>rd</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>. COSEWIC is the committee of wildlife experts tasked, under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), to provide the Minister of the Environment with status assessments, using the best available scientific, community, and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge, for species at risk in Canada.

### Southern beluga now Endangered

The St. Lawrence Estuary, one of the busiest and most heavily industrialized waterways in Canada, is also home to several species of whale, including the world's southern-most population of beluga. The St. Lawrence Estuary Beluga once numbered as high as 10,000 individuals. However, hunting, which continued until 1979, reduced the population to fewer than 1,000 animals. Since then, this majestic whale has become a conservation icon for the province of

Québec and a major draw for tourists. Today, St. Lawrence Estuary Beluga face a new suite of mounting threats, including toxic algal blooms, pollution, noise disturbance, and industrial developments. There are worrying signs of recent declines and unexplained deaths of calves. This small population is now at considerably greater risk of extinction than when it was assessed as Threatened by COSEWIC 10 years ago. Without protection of its critical habitat, this population is expected to shrink further. The St. Lawrence Estuary Beluga was assessed as Endangered.



Beluga © T.G. Smith  
(Fisheries and Oceans Canada)

### Diseases and alien insects threaten Canadian trees

Three tree species were assessed as at risk due, in part, to the threat of insects and diseases which have become pervasive throughout the species' ranges. Limber Pine trees can live up to 1000 years and Canadian populations, in British Columbia and Alberta, are experiencing sharp declines driven mainly by impacts of White Pine Blister Rust, an alien pathogen first detected on Limber Pine in 2006. Limber Pine was therefore assessed as Endangered. In the Carolinian forests of southern Ontario, the Emerald Ash Borer, another recently introduced pest, is impacting all native ash

species, including Blue Ash, a rare species already at risk before the additional onslaught of this alien beetle. While Blue Ash is more resistant to Emerald Ash Borer than other ash species, the ultimate impact of this new threat remains to be seen. Thus, Blue Ash was assessed as Threatened. The situation is more dire for Red Mulberry, another Carolinian forest species, now reduced to fewer than 200 individuals in Canada. Multiple environmental stressors make trees less resistant to twig diseases, leading to losses of this already rare tree. Red Mulberry also hybridizes readily with non-native White Mulberry, which erodes the genetic integrity of our native species. The committee assessed Red Mulberry as Endangered.

### **Island dwellers – no place to hide**

Islands can provide a safe haven from predators and human disturbance. In the absence of predators, seabirds that breed on islands can nest safely on the ground. However, breeding colonies are highly vulnerable if predators are introduced. Ancient Murrelets and Cassin's Auklets highlight this problem. These birds spend most of their lives at sea but nest on islands along the British Columbia coast. Introduced rats and raccoons have caused significant declines in breeding colonies in these species. In addition, these birds are susceptible to oil contamination and oceanic changes associated with climate change. Both of these seabirds were assessed as Special Concern.

The Sable Island Sweat Bee occurs only on Sable Island, a long narrow island 150 km off the coast of Nova Scotia. Climate change threatens the fragile habitat on the island through rising sea level and an increase in the frequency and intensity of storms. This unique bee is also affected by trampling of their food plants by large populations of Grey Seals and feral horses. This bee was assessed as Threatened.

### **Spotted Turtle on the brink**

The Spotted Turtle, restricted in Canada to wetlands in southern Ontario, is extremely prone to population decline because it doesn't reach maturity for 11-15 years, produces few young, and can live up to 100 years. These life history traits make populations vulnerable to any increase in adult mortality. Road kill and high demand for live animals for the illegal pet trade have taken a serious toll on this species, especially when combined with ongoing loss of wetland habitat. Today, there are fewer than 2,000 Spotted Turtles in Canada, and there is a high probability the species will disappear completely if threats continue. Spotted Turtle was therefore assessed as Endangered.



Spotted Turtle © S. Gillingwater

### **Three populations of Caribou declining**

Canada's caribou have evolved unique features in different habitats and regions; COSEWIC recognizes 12 distinct populations, three of which were assessed at this meeting. Boreal Caribou, which occupy intact, mature forest from Labrador to Yukon, were assessed as Threatened. Much of its habitat has been degraded, and despite considerable conservation efforts, the species is declining, especially in the southern part of its range. Cumulative impacts of oil and gas development, forestry, and other land use activities contribute to its decline.

The Newfoundland Caribou population fluctuates greatly and has declined by 68 percent since the last COSEWIC assessment in 2002 due to a combination of factors that reduce juvenile survival. The good news is that reduced hunting pressure and indications of recent improvements in calf survival suggest that the population may recover. However, future impacts of the recent arrival of coyotes – a new predator to Newfoundland – are uncertain. The Newfoundland Caribou population was assessed as Special Concern.

The Atlantic-Gaspésie Caribou population is confined to three mountains in and around Gaspésie National Park in Québec. It was assessed as Endangered. In spite of protection, the population has been declining since the 1950s, with fewer than 120 adults alive today. This isolated population persists because of intensive management, including predator control. Population models project extinction of this group within approximately 40 years.

### **Species at risk throughout Canada**

The many species now listed under SARA occur from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from southern Ontario to northern Nunavut. The responsibility to safeguard our precious natural heritage rests with Canadians everywhere.

## Next meeting

COSEWIC's next scheduled wildlife species assessment meeting will be held in Quebec City in April 2015.

## About COSEWIC

COSEWIC assesses the status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other important units of biological diversity, considered to be at risk in Canada. To do so, COSEWIC uses scientific, Aboriginal traditional and community knowledge provided by experts from governments, academia and other organizations. Summaries of assessments are currently available to the public on the COSEWIC website ([www.cosewic.gc.ca](http://www.cosewic.gc.ca)) and will be submitted to the Federal Minister of the Environment in fall 2015 for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). At this time, the full status reports and status appraisal summaries will be publicly available on the Species at Risk Public Registry ([www.sararegistry.gc.ca](http://www.sararegistry.gc.ca)).

At its most recent meeting, COSEWIC assessed 35 wildlife species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including 14 Endangered, 6 Threatened, 14 Special Concern, and 1 Extirpated (i.e. no longer found in the wild in Canada). In addition to these wildlife species that are in COSEWIC risk categories, COSEWIC assessed 1 wildlife species as Data Deficient.

COSEWIC comprises members from each provincial and territorial government wildlife agency, four federal entities (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Canadian Museum of Nature), three Non-government Science Members, and the Co-chairs of the Species Specialist and the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittees.

## Definition of COSEWIC terms and status categories:

**Wildlife Species:** A species, subspecies, variety, or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and is either native to Canada or has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.

**Extinct (X):** A wildlife species that no longer exists.

**Extirpated (XT):** A wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere.

**Endangered (E):** A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.

**Threatened (T):** A wildlife species that is likely to become Endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction.

**Special Concern (SC):** A wildlife species that may become Threatened or Endangered because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

**Not at Risk (NAR):** A wildlife species that has been evaluated and found to be not at risk of extinction given the current circumstances.

**Data Deficient (DD):** A category that applies when the available information is insufficient (a) to resolve a wildlife species' eligibility for assessment or (b) to permit an assessment of the wildlife species' risk of extinction.

**Species at Risk:** A wildlife species that has been assessed as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened or Special Concern.

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Further details on all wildlife species assessed can be found on the COSEWIC website at:  
[www.cosewic.gc.ca](http://www.cosewic.gc.ca)