



World's Largest Wildlife Facing Extinction Crisis

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July 27, 2016

New York, NY — An influential group of international scientists has declared that the world's largest wildlife species are facing an extinction crisis, and have called for a swift and global conservation response to prevent these iconic animals from being lost forever.

A report published today in *BioScience*, entitled *Saving the World's Terrestrial Megafauna*, covers the precipitous loss of large mammal populations around the globe, from the poorly known, such as the scimitar-horned oryx, to more familiar species including tigers, lions, gorillas and rhinoceroses.

Authored by 43 wildlife experts from six continents, the report includes a 13-point declaration calling for acknowledgement that a "business as usual" mentality will result in massive species extinction, and a global commitment to conservation with support for developing nations as a moral obligation, among other points.

"The more I look at the trends facing the world's largest terrestrial mammals, the more concerned I am we could lose these animals just as science is discovering how important they are to ecosystems and to the services they provide to people," said William Ripple, lead author and distinguished professor of ecology in the College of Forestry at Oregon State University. "It's time to really think about conserving them because declines in their numbers and habitats are happening quickly."

"To underline how serious this is, the rapid loss of biodiversity and megafauna in particular is an issue that is right up there with, and perhaps even more pressing than, climate change," said senior co-author and Panthera Lion Program Policy Initiative Coordinator Dr. Peter Lindsey.

"Human communities stand to lose key elements of their natural heritage if these large wildlife species are allowed to go extinct," Lindsey continued. "The disappearance of such species could also significantly undermine the future potential for communities to benefit from eco-tourism operations. Urgent measures are needed to address poaching, and to allow for the co-existence of people and wildlife if megafauna is to persist in the long term."

The scientists call for action on two fronts: conservation interventions expanded to scales that address animals' extensive habitat needs, and policy shifts and increased financial commitment to alter the ways in which people interact with wildlife.

Among the most serious threats to endangered animals are the expansion of livestock and agricultural developments, illegal hunting, deforestation and human population growth. Large wildlife species are extremely vulnerable to these threats because of their need for extensive spaces to live and low population densities, particularly for carnivores.

Panthera President and Chief Conservation Officer and co-author Dr. Luke Hunter, shared, "Among the world's largest animals, apex predators like the tiger, lion and leopard are increasingly under assault. The protection of these big cats – the great white sharks of our terrestrial Earth – and other large mammals is paramount to the health and survival of thousands of animals and their ecosystems."

Today, 59% of the world's largest carnivores and 60% of the world's largest herbivores are categorized as threatened

with extinction on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List. This situation is particularly dire in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, home to the greatest diversity of remaining large mammals.

Yet the resources for effective implementation of conservation strategies are seldom available in regions with the greatest needs. The onus is on developed countries, which have long ago lost most of their large animals, to support conservation initiatives where the world's most celebrated wildlife still remain.

About Panthera

Panthera, founded in 2006, is devoted exclusively to preserving wild cats and their critical role in the world's ecosystems. Panthera's team of leading biologists, law enforcement experts and wild cat advocates develop innovative strategies based on the best available science to protect cheetahs, jaguars, leopards, lions, pumas, snow leopards and tigers and their vast landscapes. In 50 countries around the world, Panthera works with a wide variety of stakeholders to reduce or eliminate the most pressing threats to wild cats—securing their future, and ours. Visit panthera.org