

be of great help. But there are also some caveats. The biodiversity indicators have to be robust and reliable in order to be able to compete with other national indicators and policy plans. Therefore, standard protocols are needed not only to analyze existing data, but rather to include everything from data collection to the definition of indicators. That this is not an easy task is probably best illustrated by the extremely low number of existing sets of national biodiversity indicators, or the exceptional low number of taxa for which reliable population counts exist (e.g., the African elephant). The implementation of such a system will take time and is quite costly, but nevertheless necessary, if figures on endangered species should be taken seriously in the context of the undisputedly rapidly developing pressures on the global environment.

The challenge to the SSC is then to deliver such systems. Besides its ongoing activities, the SSC might develop a complementary program that aims at developing standard techniques to produce the necessary data for the proposed indicator on the number of threatened species. This would mean that for some groups, an effort should be made to develop standardized collecting techniques, to define

the intervals at which data should be collected, and most importantly, to build up the capacity to survey periodically.

The development of such collecting protocols will depend, on the one hand, on really collected (observed) data, but to a larger extent on predictive models for distribution and stratified sampling. Whereas the collecting data are species-specific, the simulation models are generally based on data, such as topography, rainfall distribution, or land cover classification, which are the same for all the groups. As personal computers get more and more powerful global data sets are longer and more accessible, and some predictive models on the distribution of plants and animals already exist, it might be a challenge for SSC to develop those tools for their own need (i.e., for the use of their Specialist Group).

The involvement of the SSC has a further advantage. Though above mentioned indicators are used at the national level, the global network of SSC has the unique chance to provide the global perspective on the status of the endangered species.

Finally, such an instrument would allow for the first-time application of IUCN's criteria of threat to geo-referenced data, collected in a standardized way. Only such a tool, complex as it is, will have an impact on politicians and their constituency in the long term. Indicators as part of the legally binding Convention of Biological Diversity seem to be an important tool to monitor its implementation, and with it to conserve the environment.

*Donat Agosti, Chair  
Social Insects Specialist Group*

