

Public awareness on the Red List and the list of “Strictly Protected” and “Protected” species and habitats.

Prepared by: Giorgi Lebanidze

Situation analysis

Historically, Red Books were introduced in the 1960s by the IUCN¹, listing endangered species facing the risk of extinction. In Georgia the first Red Book (also referred to as the “Red Data Book”) was published in 1982, when the country was still part of the USSR.

The Red Book of the Georgian SSR included extinct, rare, and endangered animal and plant species along with some outstanding and iconic monuments of organic and inorganic nature. The Red Book described not only biological features of species but also the risk factors, rivals, diseases etc. However, it did not suggest categories for extinction risks and was different from its counterpart by the IUCN. The Red Book of the Georgian SSR had no legal basis. Nevertheless, it served as an outline for species protection measures and marked the origin of the notion “the Red List (species)” that was later deep-rooted in the public perception as a synonym to “needs to be protected”.

Later in 2003, already in the period of independent Georgia, a new law on “the Red List” and “the Red Data Book” was adopted by the Parliament². The law served as a basis for the official adoption of the first Red List of Georgia in 2006³ (re-adopted in 2014⁴). This Red List is still legally in force to this day. In fact, this is the Red List which has been prepared based on the best (yet scarce) scientific data available at the time. It introduced, for the first time in Georgian reality, the IUCN approach of threat level categorization according to the IUCN categories and criteria.

The current Red List of Georgia includes threatened and regionally extinct species only. Those are categorized either as “Critically Endangered” (CR), “Endangered” (EN), Vulnerable (VU), or “Regionally Extinct” (RE). Although the Georgian Red List shares IUCN’s standards and principles, it is different from the IUCN Red List which includes, together with threatened or extinct taxa, near threatened and least concerned species too. This is not the case in the Georgian Red List as it lists only the taxa with above-mentioned threatened and extinct categories. This fact itself underpins public perception of “the Red List” as a list of threatened species only (as it originated back in the Soviet period) and as a sole basis for species protection.

Georgia’s current Red List is outdated, as it was Developed 15 years ago. With support of the German Government, the Red List update project is being implemented now⁵. Updating the Red List (by itself a much needed process) benefits from existing circumstances as well. On the one hand, more expert

¹ International Union for Conservation of Nature, www.iucn.org

² www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/12514?publication=18&scroll=0

³ www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/97288?publication=0&scroll=0

⁴ www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2256983?publication=0&scroll=0

⁵ Red List update project lasts until the end of December 2021.

knowledge and robust scientific data became available on species during the last decade (which is absolutely crucial for the update process); on the other hand, within the Georgia-EU association agreement, Georgia is in the process of legal harmonization with the EU and, with support of the German Government, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) of Georgia is working on the new law on Biodiversity that would fall in line with the European approach to the legal aspects of species protection.



Figure 1. Simplified structure showing based on what the list of "Strictly Protected" and "Protected" species and habitats is determined (as suggested by October 2020 version of the new biodiversity draft law).

According to the new draft law on Biodiversity, Georgia's Red List is going to be a scientific list to evaluate and estimate **extinction risks** for all (or as many as possible) species in the country⁶. So, the Red List is considered to be a result of a scientific process of extinction risk evaluation. It is deemed to be more of a tool, but **not** the final list of species for protection. Together with other factors (see Figure 1), it will inform the conservation priority setting process which, on the other hand, will result in a list of **"Strictly Protected" and "Protected" species and habitats** (novelty in Georgia) – the final list of high conservation priority species and habitats defined considering the Red List, local or international regulations and/or other different factors and which require protection in accordance with the relevant regime. The list of "Strictly Protected" and "Protected" species and habitats will be approved by the Government and serve as **the legal basis** for conservation measures or decisions on the species and habitats included.

It goes without saying that public support in nature conservation generally is essential. This implies sufficient level of awareness throughout society not only about conservation measures (the "what") but also understanding the reasons (the "why"), as well as mechanisms of conservation planning and how conservation activities are guided. In these regards, the public awareness of the Red Lists and of the legal aspects of the conservation policy, matters. In the Georgian context that is going to be a challenge considering the forthcoming new reality after the new Biodiversity Law, updated Red List and the list of "Strictly Protected" and "Protected" species and habitats are in place.

The Red List update project supports some public awareness-raising measures, particularly to promote the new Red List – just as a scientific tool for policy and conservation planning, and to introduce the list of "Strictly Protected" and "Protected" species and habitats - as a novation. It is expected to be in the context of the informing society about the overall Georgian Red List update, happening as a part of the (legal) changes in the field of biodiversity conservation.

⁶ BioBrief on Georgian Draft Law on Biological Diversity. GIZ Georgia. Available online at [https://biodivers-southcaucasus.org/uploads/files/BioBrief_BDL_Eng%20\(2\).pdf](https://biodivers-southcaucasus.org/uploads/files/BioBrief_BDL_Eng%20(2).pdf)

Vision and objectives

The vision is that in Georgia, the wider public knows about the Red List, understands its role in nature conservation, perceives it not as a final list of species for conservation but as a scientific tool which, along with other factors, informs conservation priority setting process and, this way, guides nature conservation policy.

Objectives of the public awareness component of the Red List update project are the following:

- To inform the wider public what biodiversity is and why biodiversity in Georgia (and in the Caucasus) is so special and threatened;
- To inform the wider public what the IUCN Red List is (and how it helps protect species from extinction);
- To inform wider public about the Georgian Red List update process;
- To promote the updated Red List of Georgia (draft list before it gets official status) as a scientific list and one of the guiding factors for conservation policy making;
- To make wider public aware of the newly introduced list of “Strictly Protected” and “Protected” species and habitats as a final list of high conservation priority species/habitats;
- To inform the wider public about changes in legislation and regulations;

Proposed Approach

The Challenge

In the upcoming new reality, the purpose nowadays attributed to the Red List, will be ascribed to the new list of “Strictly Protected” and “Protected” species and habitats. Putting in other words, the Red List, as the legal basis for conservation prioritization will be substituted by the list of the “Strictly Protected” and “Protected” species and habitats. The main challenge of this awareness-raising measure is to facilitate this shift-of-purpose among general public, where the Red List as a sole reason for conservation priority is a deep-seated belief. It needs to be clearly communicated that this does not imply diminishing of the Red List per se, but rather making it an important scientific factor to be considered in conservation prioritization process.



Figure 2. Current and aimed public perception of the Red List.

The Focus

The concept paper focuses on the raising of public awareness on upcoming changes wherein not all species on the Red List necessarily require protection and, also those species which are not on the Red List might be protected by law. To put it in other words, people should understand that the Red List is not by default the list of species in need of protection. Such a list of species in need of protection is going to be approved separately, based on the (updated) Red List and some other criteria. This is going to be a process in the context of the new legal framework of conservation policy setting, emerging from the ongoing legal reforms.

Making the wider public aware of upcoming changes should happen through measures and to the extent feasible within the project lifetime (i.e. until the end of 2021). This awareness-raising does not cover public awareness on species/nature conservation in a broader context, which can be a subject of a large-scale awareness raising campaign. However, awareness-raising on the Red List, can be complementary to such campaigns when emphasizing the results of human activities or extinction risks.

Overall, within this measure, the awareness raising needs to focus on the following 3 main topics:

1. **the Red List** itself - what it is (international and national context), why to have it, what for etc.
2. **the Red List update process** - facts and figures about the update process (e.g. number of taxa assessed totally, as well as by taxonomic groups, experts' involvement etc.). Overall, it should be easy-to-understand overview of the process.
3. **the list of “Strictly Protected” and “Protected” species and habitats** – introducing as an upcoming novelty, its purpose, the way it is going to be elaborated etc.

As stressed above, these 3 topics should be communicated in the context of the whole ongoing reform process.

Communication

Apparently, the most effective communication channels for public outreach should be e-channels – social media, web-sites etc. Within this awareness-raising measure, different e-channels of Governmental (the MEPA and its agencies, e.g. the LEPL Environmental Information and Education Centre - EIEC), relevant academic and scientific institutions, NGOs might be used to perform public outreach.

The recommended resources include, but not restricted to the following:

- **Published updated Red List** (online) – publicly available new Red List accessible anytime from anywhere;
- **Infographics** – clear and easily interpretable visualization;
- **Video messages** – each video dedicated to a particular message and consisting of two parts – about 20 seconds speech by a relevant person, followed by about 40 second additional information and explanations on what was mentioned in the speech; The videos could be shared via social media or other e-platforms.
- **F.A.Q. brochure** – containing concise answers to the all possible questions that might arise in the general public about the Red List or any related topics;

- **Quizzes** – to attract more people to check own knowledge and learn more about the topic in a more entertaining way;
- **Opinion leaders and influencers** – to promote and popularize ideas.

The table below shows which resources can be used potentially for which topic.

Topic	The Red List (RL)	The Red List update process	The List of “Strictly protected” and “Protected” species
Published Red List	✓	✓	
Infographics	✓	✓	✓
Short videos (duration ca. 1 min)	✓	✓	✓
F.A.Q. brochure	✓	✓	✓
Quizzes	✓		✓
Opinion leaders and influencers	✓	✓	✓

It should be considered that depending on the content, using of some resources for some topics could only make sense (or even possible) after the Red List and the list of “Strictly Protected” and “Protected” species/habitats officially adopted. For example, infographics on “Strictly Protected” and/or “Protected” species is not realistic unless such list exists and adopted officially. It is not expected this list will be approved within this project lifetime; however, it is still included in the concept, together with the related awareness-raising measures, for the sake of the overall context.

In some cases, any given resource can combine more than one topic – e.g. an infographic on the Red List to some extent might cover the Red List update process and/or the list of “Strictly protected” or “Protected” species as well (as a list “substituting” the Red List with the purpose it has today).

Monitoring of concept implementation

Concept implementation will be monitored within the Red List update project monitoring under the GIZ’s Result-Based Monitoring (RBM) System that is based on 6 months monitoring periods. Apparently the awareness-raising measure falls into July 2021 – December 2021 monitoring period. This creates need for close observation on the implementation to promptly adjust implementation accordingly , if needed so.

Needed framework (institutional, legal and policy)

The most feasible scenario of development within the Red List update project lifetime (i.e. by the end of 2021) is having a draft updated Red List only. It would be the ideal case to have the new Red List already officially functional, but in order it to get the official recognition, Biodiversity-related legal framework needs to be in place. Unless the new Biodiversity draft law passes, and corresponding subsidiary legislation is developed, the current outdated Red List, listing only threatened and extinct species, will remain in

force and the “main” (if not the only) determinant of conservation policy. Apart from that, without the new Biodiversity Law, idea of the list of “Strictly Protected” and “Protected” species and habitats will not be realized.

The Biodiversity draft law development process is in the final stage in the MEPA. Its approval is expected in the nearest future; however, it is difficult to prognose the timeframe, since it depends on the framework political processes in the country. Nevertheless, even if the draft law is not adopted within the Red List update project lifetime (and most likely this will be the case), the updated Red List has a “draft” status and the list of “Strictly Protected” and “Protected” species/habitats is only mentioned in the draft law. These circumstances should not be a hindrance to the implementation of public awareness raising measures as the Biodiversity draft law adoption, within or beyond the Red List update project timeframe, is inevitable and preceding awareness raising measures will contribute to acceptance from wider public.