Securing nonflagship species from extinction

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Introduction

A recent article in *Conservation Letters* by Verissimo and colleagues provides clarity with respect to the concept of flagship species. As the authors state, the use of flagship species can offer a powerful tool for environmental organizations to raise money and raise public awareness generally. Regrettably, in many cases, the money that is raised for flagship species is tied to spending solely on that species. Consequently, other nonflagship threatened species are unlikely to benefit. The use of flagship species creates a conundrum for those organizations that aim to secure the greatest number of threatened species from extinction. This goal will not be achievable if the limited conservation budget is constrained to specific actions that only assist the few flagship species. The authors make a brief reference to this weakness of the flagship-species approach and suggest that solutions may include using the funds to pay for overheads that benefit multiple species or declaring upfront that funding will be spent on other species. We suggest that there is another option: a marketing tool that may be attractive to donors and result in funding that is not tied to a single species.

We believe that it is possible to raise funds by focusing on the task of securing large numbers of threatened species rather than a single flagship species. We illustrate the potential power of this type of marketing tool with a species prioritization exercise recently undertaken by the New Zealand Department of Conservation. In this planning exercise, priority actions, and costs and feasibility for those actions, were identified for securing each of ~660 of New Zealand's most threatened species (Joseph *et al.* 2009; O'Conner *et al.* 2009). The New Zealand government is now in the position to state how much it will cost to secure all or a selection of these species from extinction. With this kind of information, it is possible to calculate the exact amount required to secure species and make statements like: "...as little as $x million is needed to secure a given number of the most threatened species and $y million would secure a greater number." Similarly, these data can be used to demonstrate the expected gains of additional funding for threatened species. These figures give the Department of Conservation a powerful tool for seeking wider support for managing threatened species in New Zealand.

The concept of saving large numbers of endangered species is commonly used to "sell" priority landscapes or regions for conservation NGOs (e.g., Conservation International's Biodiversity Hotspots, Myers *et al.* 2000; Alliance for Zero Extinction sites, Ricketts *et al.* 2005). Yet, the example that we present here illustrates a method for proving clear and fully costed opportunities to raise funds for priority actions that will result in the recovery of threatened species specifically. We suggest that marketing the ability to secure from extinction of large numbers of species is an effective complementary tool to the flagship-species approach that can be particularly useful for securing threatened species that will never be potential flagship species.

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