**Towards monitoring global biodiversity**

Baillie JEM, **Collen B**, Amin R, Akçakaya HR, Butchart SHM, Brummitt N, Meagher TR, Ram M, Hilton-Taylor C, Mace GM (2008) *Conservation Letters* 1: 18-26

I recall Ben doing a lot of the analytical the work for this paper in about 2005-2006 before I left the Institute of Zoology to go to Imperial College. I was Director of Science then and Ben had finished his PhD (with Andy Purvis and me) and we had recruited him to work for Jonathan Baillie in the new ZSL Indicators and Assessments Unit. While Ben’s main work was with the WWF LPI dataset, Jonathan, Ben and I were still working in various ways with the IUCN Red List Unit. We were concerned by the very biased representation of species in well-known taxa that dominated the Red List, especially birds and mammals. There were great efforts going into comprehensive assessments of these groups, when what was also urgently needed was a broader approach that could track trends in conservation status over policy-relevant timescales for all the world’s species. Jonathan’s idea was to create a sampled index (SRLI – the Sampled Red List Index), rather like a regular opinion poll, and track a smaller number of randomly chosen species from major taxa across as many groups of plants and animals as possible. This raised the question of how many species should be sampled, how, and from which groups, in order to provide useful information without excessive demands on already-limited resources. There were some difficult issues about very poorly known groups where randomly selected species might all end up being completely unstudied. So the idea needed some careful thought and testing which Ben was intrigued by.

Ben and I looked at the opinion polling literature where a sample of 1500 is recommended. He did not quite believe it could be so simple and so he tested random subsets of different sample sizes on the fully assessed bird and amphibian datasets. I remember him coming in to show me the graphs and saying that after all that work it turned out that 1500 was an upper limit – rather surprisingly even fewer was enough. He really enjoyed this kind of analysis, and he was chuffed to have proved it to himself. It took us a long time to write the paper but it was an important piece of work because it set the stage for the SRLI method. Ben and Jonathan pioneered the work to implement it to great effect in many of their subsequent reports, on invertebrates for example. Others have picked up the effort so the SRLI approach is now established and widely used. The approach has become especially important for plants – Kew have published several SRLIs this year for example.

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