# Extinction – who's next

We know that one in four mammal species is at significant risk of dying out within a human lifetime. But can we predict which animals will be threatened next? Knowing this could allow conservationists to protect vulnerable species even before they start to decline.

## The Red List

Georgina Mace, director of NERC's collaborative centre, the Centre for Population Biology, was one of the key scientists involved in producing the Red List. This is an internationally recognised inventory of all the species that we know are currently under threat.

Scientists have studied the mammals on the Red List to get to know the danger signs for extinction. They have revealed that geographical distribution, human pressures, large size in primates, slow reproductive rates in carnivores and wing shapes in bats, are all indicators of extinction risk.

## Size matters

Big mammals such as the Burchell's zebra are potentially in big trouble.

By looking at evolutionary family trees, scientists can compare threatened species with their safe close relatives and then try to pin-point the differences that might lead to extinction. In doing this, they have discovered that large and small mammals need different conservation approaches. Small species will be well served by simply looking after their habitat, but large ones will need more specific help.

## Further Reading

- On being the wrong size: Why big mammals are in big trouble



**Darwin Today** has been produced for Darwin Year celebrating Charles Darwin's bicentenary. The resources highlight the continuing importance of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection in contemporary research. **Darwin Today** is produced by Research Councils UK (www.rcuk.ac.uk)