

The revised New Zealand Threat Classification System

A revised system of threat classification to support the conservation community's work with threatened taxa

WHAT IS IT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The New Zealand Threat Classification System provides a tool for assigning a threat status to New Zealand taxa (species, subspecies, etc.). The threat status of a taxon is one of the most important criteria used by the Department of Conservation (DOC) and the conservation community to prioritise management effort. The system itself is one of the important databases underlying DOC's Natural Heritage Management System (NHMS).

WHY REVIEW IT?

The system was established in 2002. Since then, there have been two listings of threatened taxa. These highlighted a number of issues. For example, the system focused unduly on population size when ranking taxa, at the expense of decline rate or trajectory. The language was also confusing in places.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

The methodology used to classify taxa was rigorously reviewed by a team of experts, many of whom were external to DOC. A revised system was then produced. This new system ensures that all possible combinations of status and trend are covered within the different categories. It is more explicit about the process, and better reflects the type of management action required for taxa in the different categories (see below).

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Major changes include:

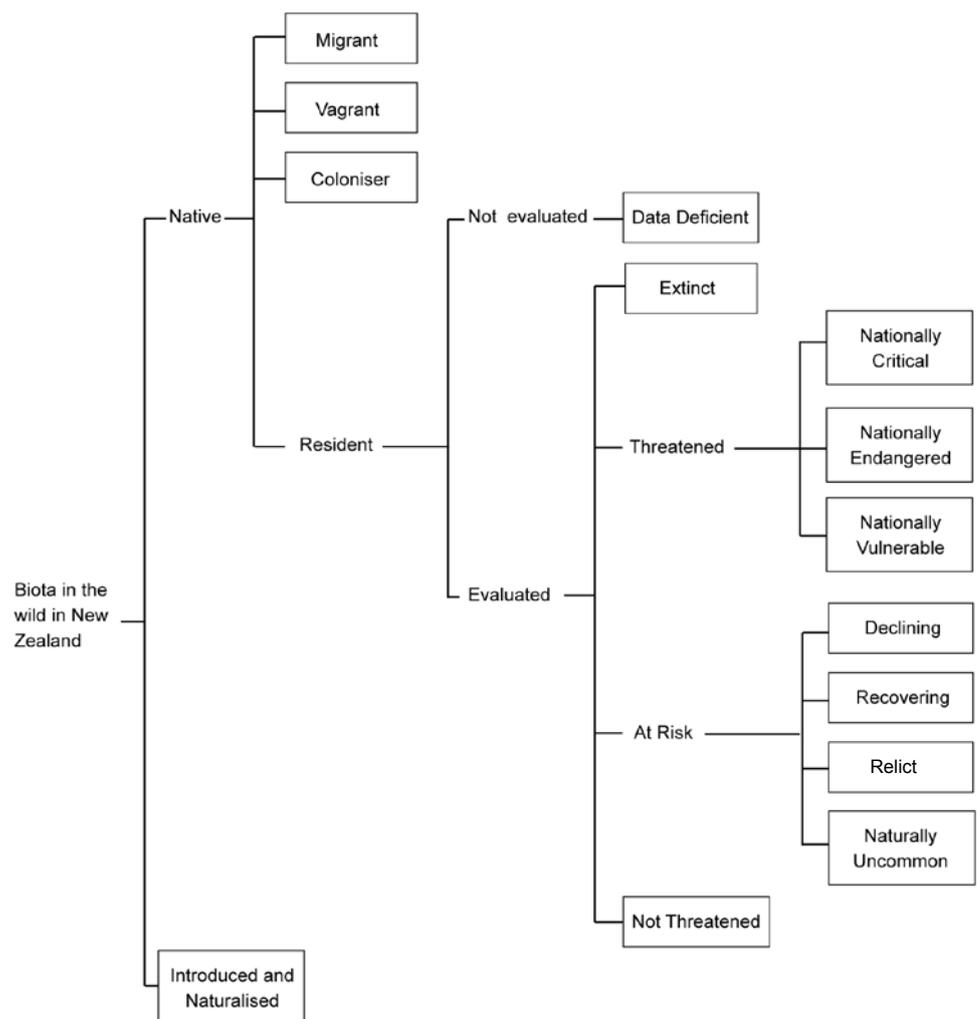
- A clearer separation between:
 - Taxa that are actively threatened with extinction and so require active management
 - Taxa that are at risk of extinction but not in any immediate danger, and so require monitoring
- Inclusion of a new category, *Recovering*, which is specifically for threatened taxa that have responded well to management actions
- Where necessary, revised definitions, qualifiers and criteria for inclusion



BENEFITS

- A clearer distinction between genuinely ‘threatened’ taxa and those merely ‘at risk’
- A better tool for prioritising management effort and resources
- Clearer terms and language
- Use of a matrix analysis to ensure that all candidate taxa are covered regardless of population size and trend, with no gaps between categories
- Clearer roles for the expert advisory team and the processes it must follow to ensure objectivity

THE REVISED STRUCTURE



Points to note

- The *Threatened* group now includes only the three most threatened categories—equivalent to the former *Acutely Threatened* group.
- Taxa that were formerly in the *Chronically Threatened* and *At Risk* groups no longer sit under the *Threatened* umbrella. Instead, they form a separate, larger *At Risk* group that is at the same level as the *Threatened* group. There are four categories within this group: *Declining*, *Naturally Uncommon*, *Recovering* and *Relict*.
- A new category called *Recovering* has been set up for formerly threatened taxa whose status is improving through management actions.
- Naturally uncommon taxa are separated from those that have declined substantially but are now stable in safe locations such as islands, using the *Naturally Uncommon* and *Relict* categories, respectively.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Many systems, documents and policies make specific reference to terms (categories and/or figures) that have changed under the revised methodology. Examples are thirdly and annual reporting and business planning templates. These will need to be changed over time.

NEW LISTINGS BY ROTATION

The revised classification will be used to create the next list of threatened taxa. This listing process used to take place in a single massive effort every 3 years. Future revisions of the different groups will be undertaken in more manageable annual ‘bites’; this will take place over 3 years, to ensure that each group is still revised every 3 years.

More information

The New Zealand Threat Classification System manual can be found on the DOC website at www.doc.govt.nz/upload/documents/science-and-technical/sap244.pdf.

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