

AMENDMENTS TO APPENDICES I AND II OF THE CONVENTION

Other Proposals

A. PROPOSAL

Inclusion of *Sphenodon guntheri* in Appendix I or amendment of Appendix I to list the genus *Sphenodon*.

B. PROPONENT

New Zealand.

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomy

11. Class: Reptilia
12. Order: Rhynchocephalia
13. Family: Sphenodontidae
14. Species: *Sphenodon guntheri* Buller (1877)

Despite Buller's (1877) description of more than one tuatara species, until recently the order was regarded as comprising a single species, *S. punctatus*.

Detailed genetic analysis of surviving populations of tuatara and review of literature on the species has led to formal differentiation of surviving members of the genus into two species and three subspecies as follows (Daugherty, *et al.* 1990), thereby reinstating the species originally described by Buller:

S. p. punctatus (Gray)
S. p. reischeki Wettstein
S. guntheri Buller

A further species, *S. diversum* Colenso, is extinct, having been described from skeletal material only.

Studies currently underway are likely to recommend synonymy of *S. p. reischeki* with *S. p. punctatus* but this work has yet to be published.

15. Common Names: English: Tuataras
French: Sphénodons
Spanish:

16. Code Numbers:

2. Biological Data

21. Distribution: In pre-historic times the tuatara occurred on the main islands of New Zealand but were probably extirpated by rats. Daugherty *et al.* (1990) summarize the recent distribution as follows:

S. p. punctatus

Present distribution - 24 islands in Hauraki Gulf and Bay of Plenty; plus four islands in Cook Strait that probably warrant separate subspecific recognition.

Populations extinct this century - Mokohinau group (3 islands), Motiti I., Slipper I., Shoe I., Whenuakura I., Whale I., Somes I.

S. p. reischeki

Present distribution - small remnant population surviving on Little Barrier Island, Hauraki Gulf.

S. guntheri

Present distribution - North Brother Island, Cook Strait.

Population extinct this century - East Island

22. Population: The single population of *S. guntheri* comprises fewer than 300 adults. While the population reproduces successfully and is presently maintaining itself, it is restricted to 1.7 ha. of scrub on the top of a single 4 ha. island.
23. Habitat: The habitat is not currently declining but is potentially at risk due to chance events such as storms, fire and the accidental introduction of rats. For 123 years until mid-1990, the island had a manned-lighthouse and the keepers had deterred illegal landings and poaching. Automation of the light has removed that protection.

3. Trade Data

31. National Utilization: Specimens of *S. guntheri* have been taken into captivity and are being bred successfully. Currently four New Zealand institutions hold the species.
32. Legal International Trade: While small numbers of tuatara are held in institutions around the world, none are of this species. Proposals for the legal transfer of breeding stock to appropriate institutions outside New Zealand are currently under consideration.
33. Illegal Trade: There is no direct evidence for illegal trade of this species, though there are unconfirmed accounts of poachers in the Cook Strait region. As recognized through their current Appendix-I listing, tuataras are regarded as being at risk of illegal trade and their are recent recorded cases of theft from institutions licensed to hold them.
34. Potential Trade Threats
341. Live Specimens: The value of any trade in tuatara would lie almost entirely in their attraction as live specimens. Provided that certain minimum standards are adhered to, the species are relatively easy to maintain in captivity.
342. Parts and Derivatives: With the possible exception of mounted specimens, trade in parts and derivatives of tuatara is unlikely.

4. Protection Status

41. National: Notwithstanding its recent re-instatement, the species has been protected under the Wildlife Act 1953 which, by default, protects all species of native terrestrial vertebrate except certain named exceptions.
42. International: No specific agreements protect the species.
43. Additional Protection Needs: *In situ* protection is needed. While the Brothers Islands are rugged and difficult of access, the single island population will still need protection from poaching, habitat disturbance and from invasion by rats or other predators. The number of captive populations is being slowly increased but is closely regulated.

5. Information on Similar Species

Information on the other species of tuatara is summarized by Daugherty *et al.* (1990) and above. *S. punctatus* is already listed in CITES Appendix I, though is clearly at less risk than *S. guntheri*.

6. Comments from Countries of Origin

NA.

7. Additional Remarks

In our view, the description of another species of tuatara increases the risk to both species of illegal trade. Despite the domestic protection of the species, there are currently no international sanctions available to protect *S. guntheri*.

There are two alternative mechanisms for including this species in Appendix I. Either it could be simply added, or the genus as a whole could be listed. The latter approach would obviate the need for further amendment given the slight possibility that future taxonomic research may identify further cryptic species.

8. References

Buller, W.L. 1877. *Trans. Proc. N.Z. Inst* 1876 9, 317-325.

Daugherty, C.H., Cree, A., Hay, J.M. and Thompson, M.B. 1990. *Nature* 347. 177-179.

