

Some time ago, [I noted this essay](#) in *Slate* by environmental journalist Brendan Borrell, arguing that our current obsession with climate change is inhibiting more important conservation work. A [new report](#) from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature provides some support for Borrell's position.

The IUCN periodically updates its Red List of Threatened Species. The most recent update to the list was last fall; this report provides an analysis of the revised list. The numbers are, unsurprisingly, dire: one quarter of the world's mammals, one third of its amphibians, and one eighth of its birds are "threatened" or worse. Across all taxonomic groups, extinction risk continues to climb.



Iberian lynx
(IUCN)

The reasons, according to the IUCN, are familiar. Direct habitat destruction still easily tops the list of threats, with pollution, overexploitation, and introduction of invasive species following behind. Climate change is not yet a major problem, but it looms large on the horizon. The report concludes that roughly 35% of bird species, 50% of amphibians, and 70% of corals have traits that make them especially susceptible to global warming.

The bottom line message is clear: conservationists need to work on two tracks, fighting climate change and simultaneously fighting the more traditional threats, which are far from being conquered. Climate change cannot be ignored, but concern about climate change cannot be allowed to swamp out attention to other threats.