

## WildFinder

### Introduction to the ecoregion map

The WildFinder database contains presence/absence data for the world's terrestrial amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals, by terrestrial ecoregion. Ecoregions are defined as “relatively large units of land that contain a distinct assemblage of natural communities and species, with boundaries that approximate the original extent of the natural communities prior to major land use change” (Olson *et al.* 2001). The 825 terrestrial ecoregions are nested within fourteen biomes with similar major vegetation features (e.g., tropical moist forests, temperate grasslands) and within eight biogeographic realms with similar geography, fauna, and flora (e.g., Neotropical, Nearctic). A full GIS coverage and dataset for these ecoregions can be downloaded at: <http://www.worldwildlife.org/science/data.cfm>

Mangrove ecoregions do not contain data because their land area is quite small and often poorly mapped; hence species lists compiled from overlaying range maps would artificially inflate species totals. A further nine ecoregions lack data, and while this is unfortunate regionally, we are confident that the omissions will not affect most large-scale studies of distribution patterns (land area of the world's ecoregions = 134,735,751 km<sup>2</sup>; land area of the nine excluded ecoregions = 236,100 km<sup>2</sup> or 0.175%). Because vast portions of Greenland and Antarctica contain no terrestrial vertebrates, the interior sections of both land masses are not mapped as ecoregions (Olson *et al.* 2001; Lamoreux *et al.* 2006).

### The species data

These data are based on the ranges of extant species. Species that are introduced, present as human commensals, vagrants, or passage migrants were not recorded. The species master lists have come from standard sources:

AMNH Amphibian Database for amphibians

(<http://research.amnh.org/herpetology/amphibia/index.php>),

EMBL Database for reptiles

(<http://www.embl-heidelberg.de/~uetz/LivingReptiles.html>),

Sibley and Monroe for birds

(<http://www.ornitaxa.com/SM/SMOrg/sm.html>),

Wilson and Reeder for mammals

(<http://nmgoph.si.edu/msw/>).

Modifications to these lists have been made at the suggestion of regional and taxonomic experts.

### Historic ranges

Where available, we used historic ranges of species (i.e., approximate distribution at 1500 AD) instead of current distributions. We did so for several reasons. First, the inclusion of historic ranges is consistent with the concept of ecoregions as reflecting historic or potential vegetation (Olson *et al.* 2001). Second, using historic ranges makes

the comparisons among groups more uniform. And third, including historic ranges in the database is important for an indication of possible regions for reintroduction. Globally extinct species are excluded from the database because original ranges are often difficult to estimate for these species and because they cannot be reintroduced anywhere.

Overall, the use of historic ranges is unlikely to change the outcome of most large-scale analyses, because such maps are only available for approximately 200 species out of more than 26,000. It is interesting to note that most of the range contractions that are documented (having published maps at different time periods) relate to large mammals (and to small mammals in Australia). This fact is likely due to large mammals being of relatively large economic, cultural, and ecological importance.

### **How the data were compiled**

Data were gathered from numerous scientific works, field guides, or directly from experts (see lists of [references](#) and [expert sources](#) below). Some degree of subjectivity is to be expected when compiling lists for any region. In general, we have tried to err on the side of inclusion rather than risk missing species within a given ecoregion. This approach will lead to errors of commission (i.e., false presence), in contrast to compilations of museum records, which could result in errors of omission (i.e., false absence). This decision was driven by our intent to inform conservation planners by providing them a comprehensive list of species they need to consider. The resulting species list can be confirmed with finer-scale data, especially when species are listed as endemics or appear as threatened or data deficient on the IUCN Red List.

Again, the database contains only presence/absence data for each species in each ecoregion. When the data are mapped, a species present in an ecoregion will appear to be found throughout it, even though it perhaps is found in only one portion. Therefore, maps in WildFinder typically overestimate the geographic range for species, and they should be interpreted with this in mind: they depict a set of ecoregions in which the species occurs, not a precise range map for the species. For example, WildFinder reports waterbirds in the Sahara Desert and broadleaf forest mammals in Luzon pine forests. These and many other species that appear out of place are in fact present, but only in microhabitats within the ecoregion. Species were not coded to indicate their habitat preferences in any way, so more detailed data will be required to locate species within ecoregions.

### **Errors and a plea for help**

We have done our best to compile accurate species lists for each ecoregion, but like any large database, WildFinder still contains many errors. Active, knowledgeable users are likely to spot some. The most efficient way to improve the database is to enlist your help in identifying and rectifying these mistakes. So please contact us with corrections or comments to the data at: [WildFinder@wwfus.org](mailto:WildFinder@wwfus.org). We will update the database continuously online, and will make a new version of the entire database available for [download](#) every six months with all known errors corrected.

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-- <http://www.zmuc.dk/headweb/>

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