

Peer Review Plan: Egyptian Tortoise Species Status Assessment Report

Timeline of the Peer review (estimated): November 19, 2019 – December 31, 2019

Draft documents to be disseminated: November 19, 2019

Peer review to be initiated: November 19, 2019

Peer review to be completed by: December 31, 2019

Determination regarding species' status expected: This report will inform a decision on whether to propose to list the Egyptian tortoise under the Endangered Species Act. This decision is expected in FY21.

About the Peer Review Process:

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the Service's August 22, 2016 Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004 Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our Species Status Assessment Report for the Egyptian tortoise.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) will request peer review from five independent experts. We will consider the following criteria:

- **Expertise:** The reviewer should have knowledge of or experience with the Egyptian tortoise or similar species biology.
- **Independence:** The reviewer should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewer should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open- minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewer should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, the Service will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the Species Status Assessment Report for the Egyptian tortoise. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers.

The Service will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the Species Status Assessment Report, and a list of citations as necessary. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available; and to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the report is based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated

into the Species Status Assessment process. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy. Rather, they should focus their review on identifying and characterizing scientific uncertainties. Peer reviewers will be asked to answer questions pertaining to the logic of our assumptions, arguments, and conclusions and to provide any other relevant comments, criticisms, or thoughts. Specific questions put to the reviewers include the following:

1. Does the report provide an accurate and adequate review and analysis of the Egyptian tortoise life history characteristics, range and distribution, habitat requirements, and population abundance, trends, or estimates?
2. Does the report provide an accurate and adequate review and analysis of potential stressors or threats to the Egyptian tortoise?
3. Are our analyses logical and supported by the evidence we provide?
4. Do we cite all necessary and pertinent literature to support our scientific analyses?

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service. Peer reviewers were advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our determinations regarding this species' status (i.e., ESA listing rules or not-warranted findings); and, (2) be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We summarized and responded to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our determinations.

About Public Participation

This peer review plan is made available to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review. The Species Status Assessment report informed our decision to propose to list the emperor penguin under the Endangered Species Act. We are publishing a proposed rule to list the species with appropriate opportunities for public review and comment. If appropriate, we will follow our proposed rule by publishing a final rule to list the emperor penguin after consideration of all comments received from the public.

Contact

For more information, contact Elizabeth Maclin at 703-358-2646 for additional information regarding this peer review plan.