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World's 2010 nature target 'will not be met'

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By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News



Threats to biodiversity, such as habitat loss, are still on the increase

The world's governments will not meet their internationally-agreed target of curbing the loss of species and nature by 2010, a major study has confirmed.

Virtually all species and ecosystems show continued decline, while pressures on nature are increasing, it concludes.

Published in the journal *Science*, the study confirms what conservationists have known for several years.

The 2010 target was adopted in 2002, but the scientists behind this study say implementation has been "woeful".

"Our analysis shows that governments have failed to deliver on the commitments they made in 2002," said research leader Stuart Butchart, from the UN Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (Unep-WCMC) and BirdLife International.

"Biodiversity is still being lost as fast as ever, and we have made little headway in reducing the pressures on species, habitats and ecosystems."

Unep chief scientist Joseph Alcamo added: "Since 1970, we have reduced animal populations by 30%, the area of mangroves and seagrasses by 20% and the coverage of living corals by

40%.

"These losses are clearly unsustainable."

Growing gap

The study combined more than 30 indicators of how species and ecosystems are changing.

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Everyone, from individuals to businesses, must act now to save all life on Earth before we reach breaking point

Jean-Christophe Vie IUCN [Richard Black's Earth Watch blog](#)

These encompass plants and animals from land and sea.

Very few of the indicators gave any hint that biodiversity loss was decreasing at all.

Meanwhile, measures of threat - such as loss of habitat, climate change and colonisation by harmful non-native species - were virtually all increasing.

Policies to restrict the threats to biodiversity are simply not up to the job, the authors argue.

"Although nations have put in place some significant policies to slow biodiversity declines, these have been woefully inadequate, and the gap between the pressures on biodiversity and the responses is getting ever wider," said Dr Butchart.

While about 12% of land is now under some kind of protection, not all of it is effectively managed.

And less than 1% of the world's oceans is protected.

'No excuse'

Conservationists hope that laying the sheer scale of the issue before governments will induce them to take tougher steps in the near future.

"We can no longer use the excuse that we don't know enough about the loss of diversity of life on our planet," said Jean-Christophe Vie, deputy head of the Species Programme at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

"The role of governments is paramount; but the magnitude and rate of loss of biodiversity means that everyone, from individuals to businesses, must act now to save all life on Earth before we reach breaking point."

Governments will review their failure to meet the 2010 target, and probably set new ones, at the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) summit in Nagoya, Japan, in October.

New targets are likely to be directed at stemming the threats to biodiversity, such as unsustainable agriculture, pollution and the growing scale of cities and transport networks.

"World leaders faced the economic crisis head on," noted Simon Stuart, head of IUCN's Species Survival Commission.

"We need that same level of investment and commitment for the environment."

Biodiversity: try as we might, things just keep dying

- 19:00 29 April 2010 by [Debora MacKenzie](#)
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The world is about to miss another deadline. By 2010 there was supposed to be "a significant reduction" in the speed at which varieties of life are disappearing.

Both the 1993 [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD) and the United Nations' 2000 [Millennium Development Goals](#) call for it. But the most wide-ranging analysis of global biodiversity ever attempted has found that it's not happening – despite what seem to be massive government efforts.

Never before has anyone produced a single measure of biodiversity across the thousands of species and habitats on Earth. Scientists working with CBD have developed 31 different surveillance schemes to track the loss of species, ecosystems or genetic variants in [mammals](#), [marine life](#), [birds](#) and [other broad categories of life](#). This week, for the first time, they have put them together.

"Together they provide overwhelming evidence that the natural world is being destroyed as fast as ever," says [Stuart Butchart](#) of the UN's [World Conservation Monitoring Centre](#) in Cambridge, UK, the study's lead author. The analysis will be part of the CBD's *Global Biodiversity Outlook 3*, to be published next month.

Promises, promises

The surveys show the diversity of life, from sea grass to mammals, has worsened overall since 1970. Meanwhile pressures that erode diversity, from overfishing to alien species invasions, have increased.

Yet this wasn't for lack of trying. Uniquely, in addition to disappearing species, the report also tracks the efforts that governments have made to keep the 2010 pledge. These have soared since 1970.

But they clearly haven't worked too well. The problem, says Butchart, is that while there have been lots of plans on paper, "they have been inadequately targeted, implemented and funded". There are lots of protected areas, but they haven't been given enough money and are not in the most biologically important places. More than 80 per cent of governments have promised to tackle invasive alien species, but fewer than half have done anything.

There are some bright spots: [European bison](#), for example, have recovered, and the [New Zealand black stilt](#), a wading bird, was saved from extinction. "These show that we can look after nature if we apply adequate resources," says Butchart. An extra \$4 billion a year, according to one estimate, he says, might make the world's protected areas effective.

Forces of destruction

"But what do you expect?" asks [Daniel Pauly](#) of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, a leading fisheries scientist and co-author of the report. "The forces destroying biodiversity are huge – human economic expansion, shoving everything out of its way. The forces working against that are tiny. This won't change until a force emerges that is similar in strength to the forces spreading destruction."

The 193 nations that belong to the biodiversity convention will meet in October in Nagoya, Japan, to base new targets on this analysis. "2010 will not be the year losses were halted or even slowed," says Butchart. "But it must be the year in which governments started taking the issue seriously and substantially increased efforts to take care of what is left on our planet."

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