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International failure to meet target to reduce biodiversity decline

Pressures on the natural world have risen since the 2002 Convention on Biological Diversity, say conservation groups

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The world has failed to meet the target set by international leaders to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by this year, experts will announce next month.

Instead, a coalition of 40 conservation organisations claims there have been “alarming biodiversity declines”, and that pressures on the natural world from development, over-use and pollution have risen since the ambition was set in the 2002 Convention on Biological Diversity.

The first formal assessment of the target, published today in the journal *Science*, will be the basis of a formal declaration by the CBD in Nairobi on 10 May, at which governments will be pressed to take the issues as seriously as climate change and the economic crisis.

A growing number of studies have shown that it is almost impossible to calculate the value of the “ecosystem services” from the natural world, from food, rich soil and fuel for local people, to clean air and water, and plants used for the international pharmaceutical industry.

“Since 1970 we have reduced animal populations by 30%, the area of mangroves and sea grasses by 20% and the coverage of living corals by 40%,” said Professor Joseph Alcamo, chief scientist of the United Nations



The critically endangered araripe manakin (left), which is declining owing to ongoing habitat clearance for agriculture within its tiny range in Brazil and the critically endangered spoon-billed sandpiper from Asia (right).

Photograph: Chaiwat Chinuparawat and Andy & Gill Swash

Environment Programme, one of the contributing organisations.

“These losses are clearly unsustainable, since biodiversity makes a key contribution to human well-being and sustainable development.”

The *Science* study compiled 30 indicators of biodiversity, including changes in populations of species and their risk of extinction, the remaining areas of different habitats, and the composition of communities of plants and animals.

“Our analysis shows that governments have failed to deliver on the commitments they made in 2002: biodiversity is still being

lost as fast as ever, and we have made little headway in reducing the pressures on species, habitats and ecosystems,” said Stuart Butchart, the paper’s lead author.

“Our data show that 2010 will not be the year that biodiversity loss was halted, but it needs to be the year in which we start taking the issue seriously and substantially increase our efforts to take care of what is left of our planet.”

Examples of successful policies that have helped preserve and sometimes restore species and ecological areas are also highlighted in *Science*, and politicians are called on to fund more such initiatives.

These include new protected areas, including the Juruena national park in Brazil; projects leading to the recovery of species such as the European bison, and even animals on the brink of extinction, such as the black stilt, a wader bird from New Zealand.

Ahmed Djoghlaif, the CBD's executive secretary, said: "While many responses have been in the right direction, the relevant policies have been inadequately targeted, implemented and funded. Above all biodiversity concerns must be integrated across all

parts of government and business, and the economic value of biodiversity needs to be accounted for adequately in decision-making."

The failure to meet the CBD target will not be a surprise to experts or policymakers, who have warned for years that too little progress was being made. Last month the head of the IUCN species survival commission, Simon Stuart, told the Guardian that for the first time since the dinosaurs species were believed to be becoming extinct faster than new ones were evolving.

Natural England, the government's countryside agency, also warned that more than two species a year were becoming extinct in England.

Three weeks ago, in another paper in Science, the eminent ecologist E O Wilson led calls from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and nine other conservation groups for a "barometer of life" to track the changing fortunes of 160,000 of the world's 2m known species.

But nations have mostly failed to meet those goals, according to the Global Biodiversity Outlook 5, the UN scorecard released ahead of a summit on the issue at the end of the month. "From COVID-19 to massive wildfires, floods, melting glaciers and unprecedented heat, our failure to meet the Aichi (biodiversity) targets "protect our our home" has very real consequences," Ms Andersen said. "We can no longer afford to cast nature to the side." Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon connected the problems to "a lack of global partnership and political leadership", in an interview with AP. He said multilateralism has been under attack, citing the US's withdrawal from the Paris climate change agreement as an example.

ures to meet United Nations biodiversity targets. Some countries are more severely underfunded than others and therefore represent a now, in a swift and coordinated fashion, to reduce an immediate wave of further biodiversity declines at relatively little cost.

Methods Summary. We collated a database of country-level conservation funding flows from 1992 to 2013. Biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate, and the pressures driving this decline are intensifying. None of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets will be fully met, in turn threatening the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and undermining efforts to address climate change," Tuesday's report read. "At the global level none of the 20 targets have been fully achieved, though six targets have been partially achieved." The report specifically found that natural habitats are still disappearing, several species are still threatened with extinction and hundreds of billions of dollars in environmentally damaging government subsidies have yet to be eliminated, among other things. Financial costs of meeting global biodiversity conservation targets: current spending and unmet needs. *Science* 338, 946-949 (2012). Article ADS CAS PubMed Google Scholar. 8. Waldron, A. et al. Targeting global conservation funding to limit immediate biodiversity declines. *Proc. Natl Acad.* Vandegrift, J. Elephant poaching: CITES failure to combat the growth in Chinese demand for ivory. *Virginia Environ. Law J.* 31, 102 (2013). BDS = Biodiversity Decline Score. i\$ = millions of international dollars (rounded to nearest i\$0.1m). NA = historical strict biodiversity funding cannot be robustly estimated. 0.0 = mean investment in strict biodiversity conservation for 1992-2003 genuinely seems to have been extremely small or zero. (XLS 62 kb). Supplementary Table 2. Biodiversity declines have progressed rapidly (1), and further delays in improving finance are likely to lead to even greater global extinction risks, the opposite of what is needed to make progress on Aichi biodiversity targets (4, 8, 14). We therefore need tools that can rapidly and consistently estimate current levels of underfunding by country but are also robust to current uncertainties in data and knowledge. A recent assessment suggested that global funding would need to increase by at least an order of magnitude to meet CBD biodiversity targets (without suggesting how that funding should be distributed among countries) (3). However, such a large increase may not be politically achievable in time to meet 2020 targets, in which case we would need to know how to proportionally allocate a.