

## UN agencies unite to tackle biodiversity

When he took the podium at Columbia University in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic to deliver his “State of the Planet” address, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres issued a passionate and urgent warning.

“Humanity is waging war on nature. This is suicidal,” he said. “Nature always strikes back – and it is already doing so with growing force and fury.”

Today, with COVID-19 still raging around the world, devastating economies and killing and sickening millions, the global community increasingly recognizes that the overlapping crises of the pandemic, economic inequality and climate change are linked to a fourth crisis: the accelerating destruction of species and their habitats.

To chart the way forward, the UN has launched the [UN Common approach on biodiversity and nature-based solutions for sustainable development into the UN’s policy and programme planning and delivery](#), a commitment endorsed by the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), and [A UN System Commitment for Action to assist Member States delivering on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework](#), a report by the Environment Management Group (EMG).

The UN system’s commitment to the nature agenda was presented today (25 May) by senior Government and UN officials at a [virtual debate](#) open to the public. Together they express the UN’s resolve to urgently address the loss of biodiversity through a broad and inclusive partnership.

### The Living, Breathing Web of Life

The UN recognises the need for urgent action to mainstream biodiversity into broader governmental policies and UN policies and programmes. It calls for catalysing greater action to halt the loss of species and habitats and to restore biodiversity. This will require going beyond conserving individual species to addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss and ultimately ‘making peace with nature.’

UN system entities are expressing a shared recognition of the urgency to act in order to facilitate the implementation of the Post-2020 global biodiversity framework in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. They stress that positive outcomes can be promoted through specific and collaborative interventions by the UN system at the global, regional and national levels in support of Member States and non-state actors.

The *UN Common Approach on Biodiversity* was developed in response to a directive from the Secretary-General to accelerate collective action that would marshal the full capacity of the United Nations.

Indeed, given the interlinkages among the natural environment and other global issues, virtually all aspects the UN’s work are relevant to protecting biodiversity. Whether that involves mitigating climate change, eradicating poverty or promoting gender equity and human rights, the more that people do to damage nature, the harder it will be to achieve these goals and the broader 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda is critically dependent on biodiversity in many ways: 14 of the [17 sustainable development goals \(SDG\)](#) have biodiversity-related elements that are essential to the goals' success. Eighty per cent of the SDG targets on poverty, hunger, water, cities, climate, oceans and land are being undermined by negative trends in biodiversity and ecosystem services.

COVID-19 has only reinforced the need to maintain the delicate balance between human well-being and nature. The UN Environment Programme's (UNEP) landmark [2020 report on zoonotic diseases](#) found that 60 per cent of microbes known to infect humans were transferred from wildlife to people. As the world's population edges towards 8 billion, rampant development is putting humans and animals in increasingly close quarters, making it easier for diseases to pass between species.

As the Secretary-General said last December, "Biodiversity is not just cute and charismatic wildlife; it is the living, breathing web of life."

### **Better together**

UN agencies are already working together on biodiversity in many parts of the world. In Madagascar and Guyana, the Food and Agriculture Organization's [Sustainable Wildlife Management Programme](#) provides local communities the means to raise their own protein, instead of exploiting wildlife. On the Mongolian steppes, the UN Development Programme links local herders and international brands to preserve habitat through its [Green Commodities Program](#). And through the [Global Peatlands Initiative](#), UNEP works with partners across six continents to sustain the world's largest collective terrestrial carbon sink.

The Global Environmental Facility, a funding mechanism founded in October 1991 to implement the decisions of multilateral environmental agreements, has supported national efforts to implement the so-called Rio Conventions. The portfolio includes diverse initiatives – from protecting an [urban park teeming with wildlife](#) in Côte d'Ivoire, to restoring degraded and overexploited [mangroves in Haiti](#), to initiating a program in Georgia that fosters [sustainable land management practices](#) among the nation's farmers.

"The UN system has the wide reach and range of expertise needed to support collective action for people, the planet and prosperity," said Ms Ligia Norona, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Head of UNEP New York Office.

"Building on the UN system's commitment on biodiversity, and drawing on the resources of individual funds, programmes and agencies, a collective UN effort can contribute to strengthening the global response to COVID-19. A green and inclusive recovery can help us to shift away from activities that deplete biodiversity, towards those that support ecosystem resilience."