

Biodiversity: try as we might, things just keep dying

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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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