



Global biodiversity continues to decline

Indications suggest global biodiversity mostly continues to decline, confirming that the goal of halting the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010 has not been met, according to a recent study. Pressures on biodiversity are increasing despite increasing policy and management responses. However, with greater resources and political will, the researchers argue that the loss of biodiversity could be halted or even reversed.

In this study, 31 individual indicators of biodiversity were assessed in order to determine progress towards meeting the target of reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010, as agreed by parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity¹ in 2002. Environmental indicators are used to summarise complex environmental information; tracking changes in indicators is a means of monitoring the environment.

Most indicators (8 out of 10) used to describe the state of global biodiversity depicted an ongoing decline in biological diversity since the 1970s. For example, indicators that gauge populations of vertebrates, habitat-specialist wild birds and shorebirds demonstrated overall decline. Other indicators describing the state of global diversity showed that forest, mangrove and seagrass coverage continues to decline. Although the condition of coral reefs has declined, this deterioration has not accelerated since the 1980s.

Most indicators used to assess pressures on biodiversity have shown increasing trends over the last four decades. Increases have been seen in indicators for resource consumption by humans, the deposition rate of nitrogen, the number of alien species in Europe, the over-exploitation of fish stocks, and the impact of climate change on European bird populations. It is possible, however, that nitrogen deposition rates are now beginning to slow.

Policy and management responses indicate increasing awareness of the problems. The extent of Protected Areas, area of sustainably managed forest, the percentage of countries signing international agreements relevant to combating invasive alien species, and international aid related to biodiversity, amongst others, have all increased. Despite these increased policy efforts, it appears the rate of improvement achieved by policy initiatives has slowed.

However, the study highlighted some successes and positive trends, suggesting that with sufficient resources and political resolve, the loss of biodiversity could be halted or even reversed. One example is improved population trends of some bird species in Europe which have benefited from the protection regime of all wild birds in Europe under the EU Birds Directive².

The researchers suggest that for biodiversity losses to be slowed and then halted, biodiversity must be integrated into broad-scale land-use planning, the full economic value of biodiversity must be recognised in decision-making and adequate funding for effective policies should be provided.

1. See: www.cbd.int

2. See: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/birdsdirective/index_en.htm

Source: Butchart, S.H.M., Walpole, M., Collen, B. *et al.* (2010). Global Biodiversity: Indicators of Recent Declines. *Science*. 328 (5982): 1164-1168.

Contact: stuart.butchart@birdlife.org

Theme(s): Biodiversity