

Data point to some improvements in China's environment

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The rapid growth of China's forests over the past 20 years makes them the fastest growing forest resources in the world, according to an assessment published in the November issue of *BioScience*.

The study, by Haigen Xu of the Nanjing Institute of Environmental Sciences and nine colleagues, examined an array of indicators of biodiversity in China as part of an effort to assess China's progress toward the goals of the Convention of Biological Diversity. Parties to the convention agreed in 2002 to reduce biodiversity loss significantly by 2010.

China is a megadiverse country that has been undergoing rapid development, so the finding of growing forest stocks is surprising, although some of the growth may have consisted of monoculture plantations, which do not increase biodiversity.

The increase in forest cover was not the only bright spot that Xu and colleagues discovered. The amount of desertified land in China decreased between 1999 and 2004, emissions of many industrial pollutants have fallen, and a measure of marine ecosystem health shows that Chinese waters have started to improve--probably because of fishing restrictions--after reaching a low in 1997.

The favorable indicators do not conceal some bleak realities and worsening trends. Pollution in Chinese [marine ecosystems](#) is "still very severe;" mammal, fish, and [bird species](#) across the country are under

increasing threat; and the use of fertilizers and pesticides that pollute rivers and lakes is increasing. Grasslands are declining, and the number of newly discovered invasive alien species shows "a tremendous upward trend," Xu and his colleagues write. The area devoted to [nature reserves](#) is large and has grown, although many of the reserves are poorly marked and maintained.

All in all, the authors say, despite major efforts by the Chinese government, "China still faces grave challenges in pollution control and biodiversity conservation." They note that "the next decade is a critical period for [China](#) to engage all stakeholders in protecting its rich and unique [biodiversity](#)."

Source: American Institute of Biological Sciences ([news](#) : [web](#))

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