

Cross-border conservation efforts can yield better results at less cost

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Dr. Salit Kark of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem says that cross-border conservation efforts can achieve better results at less cost. Credit: courtesy of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Coordination of conservation efforts across national boundaries could achieve significantly higher results and at less cost than conservation actions planned within individual states, researchers at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and in Australia have found.

Dr. Salit Kark of the Alexander Silberman Institute of Life Science and Dr. Noam Levin of the Department of Geography at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, together with Dr Hedley Grantham and Professor Hugh Possingham from the University of Queensland in Australia, wanted to determine how much more efficient it might be if countries within the Mediterranean basin collaborated their conservation

decisions and efforts.

"We wanted to investigate the costs and benefits of international collaboration on biodiversity conservation. We chose the terrestrial Mediterranean basin due to its complexity. On the one hand it is an important global biodiversity hotspot with many endemic and rare species. On the other hand, it holds over 25 countries with 250 million people, and large threats are posed to its unique biodiversity. Currently, conservation efforts are largely uncoordinated across the whole region," said Dr Kark, head of the Hebrew University Biodiversity Research Group.

The study -- featured on the cover of a recent edition of the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) of the USA -- found that there could be a \$67-billion savings in costs if conservation efforts of endemic vertebrates were coordinated across all the highly threatened Mediterranean ecosystem, compared with an uncoordinated plan. The amount saved is estimated as 45% of the total cost.

A coordinated plan with just the European Union (EU) countries would also lead to substantial savings compared with no coordination across the Mediterranean Basin's countries. The authors also discuss the limitations of coordinating efforts.

"Because countries belonging to the European Union cover nearly half of the area of the Mediterranean Basin, we estimated the costs and benefits of conservation when efforts are coordinated across the whole Mediterranean and compared this to an EU partly coordinated plan and with the current situation where each country does its own thing," Dr Levin, a Geographic Information Systems and remote sensing expert, said.

"While many conservation studies consider biodiversity, in the real

world one needs to consider the cost of conservation and the threats to [biodiversity](#). This study shows that when conservation costs and threats are taken into account, conservation is much more efficient," said Prof. Possingham. It would be ideal if conservation dollars could be directed to areas with the highest return on investment, however, this requires the ability to transfer money across national boundaries, something that is rarely considered, said Dr Grantham.

"The initiative declared in the recent Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, which nearly all heads of state from the Mediterranean Basin, including those from Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean Basin and North Africa attended, provides a political basis for coordination. [Conservation](#) would be an excellent avenue for countries across the region to work together," said Dr Kark.

Provided by Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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