

Climate change beats biodiversity as a press, scientific, and funding priority

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As climate change has become a more prominent public concern, some scientists have worried that it might distract attention from related environmental problems, such as the global loss of biodiversity. In an article to be published in the July issue of *BioScience*, Diogo Veríssimo of the University of Kent in England and his colleagues examine that idea by analyzing coverage of those issues in US and UK newspapers, as well as in scientific journals, over the past quarter-century. The researchers also examine changes in the funding priorities of the World Bank and of the US National Science Foundation.

The indicators that the authors examined "substantiate some of these fears," they write. For newspapers, they looked at USA Today, The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal in the United States, and The Guardian, The Independent, The Times, and the Financial Times in the UK. Press attention devoted to [biodiversity](#) has remained stable since 1990, but the proportion of [climate change](#) reports rose before 2007 and has stayed substantially higher than biodiversity since 2005.

In [scientific journals](#), papers on biodiversity loss and conservation have increased at a steady pace, but publication of papers on climate change accelerated markedly around 2006 and overtook them. Papers with a dual focus are less common, but their numbers are increasing. Funding by the World Bank shows no evident change over the past 20 years, with climate change projects funded at a much greater rate than biodiversity projects. The US National Science Foundation's investments directed

toward climate change research have increased substantially since 1987, but biodiversity expenditures have increased much less and have held steady since 2004. Dual-focus projects are being funded more often, but Veríssimo and his coauthors write that "this rise is relatively small and does not mitigate the plateauing expenditure on biodiversity research."

To prevent biodiversity from becoming a declining priority, conservationists need to "analyze the discourse surrounding climate change and determine how it has become the predominant environmental topic," the authors suggest. In addition, given that many human influences are driving both climate change and [biodiversity loss](#), researchers should look for "win-win" solutions wherever possible. The authors hold up the United Nations program REDD+ (an extension of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation program) as an example of such a win-win solution: It protects forests while also creating benefits for local communities and biodiversity.

Provided by American Institute of Biological Sciences

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