

# New paper aims to put biodiversity at the heart of business

July 15 2016, by Tim Knight

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Credit: Fauna & Flora International

Nature needs to be put at the heart of natural capital – that's the conclusion from a new report published today by a partnership of leading conservation and research organisations.

Conservation NGOs have come together through the Cambridge Conservation Initiative to help ensure that businesses take full account of biodiversity.

To coincide with the launch of the Natural Capital Protocol this week, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has teamed up with other members of

the Cambridge Conservation Initiative (CCI) to spearhead an initiative to put biodiversity front and centre in the discussions about how businesses manage their impact on the planet's finite natural resources.

For the uninitiated, natural capital can be broadly defined as "the stock of renewable and non-renewable natural resources such as plants, animals, air, water, soils and minerals that combine to yield a flow of benefits to people."

As with financial capital, if businesses keep plundering these resources without reinvesting, stocks will become increasingly depleted to the point where the system – in this case the ecosystem – may eventually collapse, with disastrous environmental, social and economic consequences.

The Natural Capital Protocol is a set of guidelines intended to help companies quantify, account for and minimise their impact on our shared natural resources. It is being developed through the aptly named Natural Capital Coalition, a global platform uniting individuals and organisations from industry, finance, academia and government who share a vision of a world where business conserves and enhances natural capital.



Destruction of coral reefs has a significant impact on marine stocks. Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI

One of the key challenges highlighted by the protocol is how to incorporate biodiversity within the natural capital framework. The services that nature provides are underpinned by biological diversity, which is what makes our natural world more robust and keeps the system functioning (you can learn more about this in our jargon buster blog post). As such, biodiversity is a crucial component of natural capital that supports or influences almost every product or service we value, as well as having its own intrinsic value. But its complexity makes it notoriously difficult to factor into a natural capital assessment.

In response to this, FFI and other CCI partners have come together to draw up a paper for the protocol [launch](#) that proposes four positive steps



to help businesses address this crucial issue:

- The stock of natural capital should be at the heart of any natural capital assessment
- Targets with respect to biodiversity should be identified
- Indicators that provide information on the state of biodiversity that a [business](#) is responsible for, or has a commitment to, should be developed
- The cost of delivering biodiversity targets should be estimated and reported in natural capital accounts to reflect a company's liability with regard to maintenance of natural capital assets on which it depends or has impact



Biodiversity underpins the services that nature provides. Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI

"Companies are increasingly recognising the need to incorporate some of the simpler and more measurable aspects of natural capital into their decision-making processes, such as water consumption or carbon emissions; however, biodiversity continues to be perceived by companies as a 'nice to have' rather than an integral part of the natural systems that they both impact and rely on," said Tom Maddox, Senior Technical Specialist for FFI's Business and Biodiversity programme, who led the development of the paper. "The Natural Capital Protocol is an excellent framework for helping companies understand the issues, but we still need to work on ensuring the resulting assessments incorporate biodiversity in a way that is practical, yet scientifically valid and socially acceptable."

Discussions have led to the establishment of a formal partnership between CCI and the Natural Capital Coalition, which, it is hoped, will help to ensure that the value of biodiversity is embedded into natural capital management.

This paper is the latest in a string of FFI-led initiatives aimed at putting biodiversity at the heart of accounting for natural capital. In 2007, it set up the Natural Value Initiative, using the [natural](#) capital concept to encourage financial institutions to support businesses that were demonstrably committed to managing their impact on [biodiversity](#) and ecosystem services. In the intervening years FFI has produced a series of reports, briefing papers and toolkits directed at decision makers in this arena.



Fruit bats and other pollinators perform an indispensable service. Credit: Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI

**More information:** Download the paper for more information:  
[www.fauna-flora.org/wp-content.../2016\\_web-version.pdf](http://www.fauna-flora.org/wp-content.../2016_web-version.pdf)

Provided by Fauna & Flora International

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