

# Laws crucial to preserve biodiversity threatened

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The mounting threats posed to the global environment by harmful human activities cannot be averted without effective legislation controlling those activities. However, the environmental laws designed for this purpose are themselves under global attack, warns an international team of scientists including Arie Trouwborst of Tilburg University in the journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*.

Because it is binding and enforceable, legislation is a unique and essential instrument in the overall effort to keep humanity's impacts on the planet from transgressing critical thresholds. For instance, biodiversity laws do so by designating and protecting natural areas and controlling the exploitation of wildlife populations. Yet, due to short-term economic and other interests, such laws face constant pressures aimed at weakening their regulatory impact on human activities.

## Tactics

This new study reveals and illustrates the staggering number and diversity of tactics used to weaken biodiversity legislation across the globe. This 'taxonomy of tactics' encompasses dozens of categories, ranging from the creative re-definition of terms to the 'fast-tracking' of environmentally harmful projects, and from limiting concerned citizens' access to court, to the silent or even express refusal of appointed authorities to enforce biodiversity laws.

Whereas the predicament of the planet's wild fauna and flora would have been even worse without the legal protection they have received so far, the onslaught against biodiversity laws has prevented these from fully performing their assigned function. The global acceleration of wildlife population declines bears witness to this.

To help stem the tide, the study's authors – ecologists from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and Oviedo University in Spain, and legal academics from Uppsala University in Sweden and Tilburg University in the Netherlands – call for increased cooperation between biodiversity conservation experts and legal experts. Strategic approaches are needed to anticipate and counter attacks on biodiversity legislation; to make the most of existing laws, including in court if need be; and to develop new or improved laws where necessary.

**More information:** Bolster legal boundaries to stay within planetary boundaries. [www.nature.com/articles/s41559-017-0086](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-017-0086)

Provided by Tilburg University

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