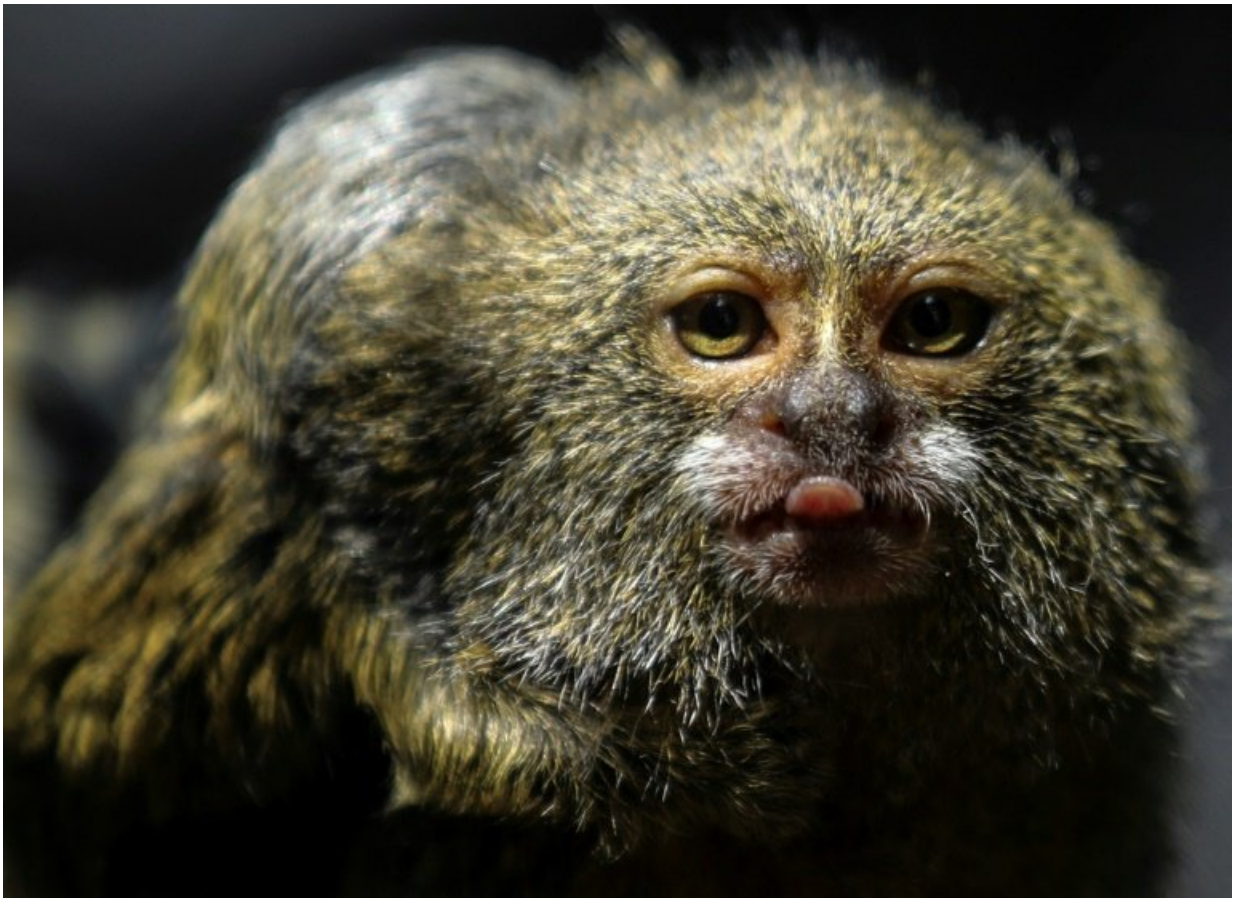


# Humanity imperiled by abuse of life-giving Nature: reports (Update)

March 23 2018, by Mariëtte Le Roux

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A titi pigmeo monkey (*Cebuella Pygmaea*) is pictured at a zoo in Medellin, Colombia, which is hosting a major international biodiversity conference

Humanity is risking its own well-being by over-harvesting and harming

Nature's bounty, said a comprehensive survey Friday that warned animal and plant species were in decline in every world region.

Four mammoth reports that took more than 550 scientists three years to compile, warned that Asia-Pacific fish stocks could run out by 2048 and more than half of African bird and mammal species could be lost by 2100.

Up to 90 percent of Asia-Pacific corals will suffer "severe degradation" by 2050, said the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

"This alarming trend endangers economies, livelihoods, food security and the quality of life of people everywhere," according to the most extensive biodiversity survey since 2005.

"We're undermining our own future well-being," added IPBES chairman Robert Watson.

The IPBES brought together experts from around the globe to assess four world regions: the Americas, Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia—all the planet except for the Antarctic and the open seas.

The volunteers combed through some 10,000 scientific publications.

After days of intense word-by-word negotiations, envoys from the IPBES' 129 member countries approved summaries of the four reports, which will guide governments in policymaking.

The texts make for grim reading.

## **Mass extinction will continue**

Unless humanity reverses its unsustainable use of Nature, we risk "not only the future we want, but even the lives we currently lead," said Watson.

"If we continue the way we are... the sixth mass extinction, the first one ever caused by humans will continue," he told AFP.

Scientists say mankind's voracious consumption of biodiversity has unleashed the first mass species die-off since the demise of the dinosaurs—only the sixth on our planet in half-a-billion years.

Two species of vertebrate—animals with a backbone—have gone extinct every year on average for the past century.

Just this week, the death of Sudan—the world's last northern white rhino male—served as a stark reminder of the stakes.

For the Americas, the survey warned that species populations—already 31 percent smaller than when the first European settlers arrived—will have shrunk by about 40 percent by 2050.



The purpose of the conference is to give a comprehensive assessment of the state of biodiversity around the world

An estimated 500,000 square kilometers of African land is estimated to be degraded, added the assessment. As the continent's population doubles to 2.5 billion by 2050, further pressure will be brought to bear.

The Asia-Pacific region's biodiversity faces "unprecedented threats", said the IPBES reports, "from extreme weather events and sea level rise, to invasive alien species, agricultural intensification and increasing waste and pollution."

In the European Union, meanwhile, only seven percent of marine species assessed had a "favorable conservation status".

## **Demand will grow**

In many places of the world, climate change driven by mankind's burning of fossil fuels for energy, was worsening biodiversity loss, the reports found.

"This is what we've got to get across to policy makers: we have to look at climate change and biodiversity together," Watson said.

"Climate change affects biodiversity, changes in our natural vegetation affects climate change. And both of them, if we don't do this correctly, will undermine many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: clean water for everyone, food security for people, energy security, human security, equity."

The hurdles are many.

"Economic growth is going to continue. Population growth is going to continue to 2050, therefore demand for resources will grow," said the IPBES chairman.

Even at best-case-scenario levels, global warming will continue adding to species loss, which will cause further degradation of ecosystems.

But the scientists do point to possible solutions: creating more protected areas, restoring degraded zones, and rethinking subsidies that promote unsustainable agriculture.

Crucially, governments, businesses, and individuals must integrate biodiversity considerations in all decisions: whether it concerns farming, fishing, forestry, mining, or infrastructure development.

Ending food waste—as much as 40 percent of all that is produced—is also key. If this can be achieved, food production may not need to double to meet the population explosion predicted.

Consumers, too, must be more responsible, by reducing their intake of meat—a resource-hungry and polluting protein resource—for example.

Different regions will require different solutions, said Watson, adding: "it's not too late" to halt, or even reverse, some of the harm.

"Can we stop all of it? No. Can we significantly slow it down? Yes," he concluded.

The IPBES will bring out a fifth report on the global state of soil, fast being degraded through pollution, forest-destruction, mining, and unsustainable farming methods that deplete its nutrients.

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