

In degrading Nature humanity harms itself, UN report warns

April 25 2019, by Marlowe Hood



The pace of biodiversity loss on Earth is 10-100 times higher than any other time in recent history, a UN report will find

Diplomats and scientists from 130 nations gather in Paris next week to vet and validate the first UN global assessment of the state of Nature in

more than a decade, and the news is not good.

A quarter of 100,000 species already assessed are on a path to extinction, and the total number facing a forced exit from the world stage is closer to a million, according to an executive summary, obtained by AFP, of a 1,800-page scientific report three years in the making.

A score of 10-year targets adopted in 2010 under the UN's biodiversity treaty—to expand protected areas, slow species and [forest loss](#), and reduce pollution impact—will almost all fail, the draft Summary for Policy Makers reports.

But the focus of the five-day meet is not just pangolins, pandas, polar bears and the multitude of less "charismatic" lifeforms that humanity is eating, crowding or poisoning into oblivion.

Rather, the spotlight is on the one species that has so ravaged Earth's natural systems as to imperil its own existence as well.

That, of course, would be us: homo sapiens.

The accelerating loss of clean air, [drinkable water](#), healthy soil, pollinating insects, protein-rich fish and storm-blocking mangroves—to name but a few of the dwindling services rendered by Nature—poses no less of a threat to humanity than [climate change](#), according to the report, set to be unveiled May 6.

"Up to now, we have talked about the importance of biodiversity mostly from an environmental perspective," said Robert Watson, chair of the UN-mandated body that compiled the report, told AFP.



Europe has lost 80 percent of its insect population in just three decades

"Now we are saying that Nature is crucial for food production, for pure water, for medicines and even social cohesion."

And to fight climate change, he added.

Forests and oceans, for example, soak up half of the planet-warming greenhouse gases we spew into the atmosphere. If they didn't, Earth might already be locked into an unliveable future of runaway global warming.

And yet, an area of tropical forest five times the size of England has

been destroyed since 2014, mainly to service the growing [global demand](#) for beef, biofuels, soy beans and palm oil.

It would be like setting fire to a lifeboat while lost at sea in order to cook the fish one just caught.

Hidden impacts

"We need to recognise that climate change and loss of Nature are equally important, not just for the environment, but as development and economic issues as well," Watson said.

"The way we produce our food and energy is undermining the regulating services that we get from Nature."



Experts want a Paris-style agreement to enjoin nations to work towards biodiversity targets the same as they do for climate

Set up in 2012, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) synthesises published science for policymakers in the same way the IPCC does for climate.

Both advisory bodies are tied to UN treaties.

But the Convention on Biological Diversity has always been a poor stepchild compared to its climate counterpart, and the IPBES—unlike the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—was added two decades later as an afterthought, making its authority harder to establish.

For the public, "biodiversity" remains an abstract concept, and its impacts harder to see: species loss is invisible and remote compared to deadly heatwaves, superstorms and sea-level rise.

"There is no question that the climate convention is stronger," Watson said.

"But our goal is to make sure that governments and the private sector really start to take biodiversity as seriously as they do climate."

Species disappearing

One major finding of the report to be reviewed next week that might help do that is "an imminent rapid acceleration in the global rate of species extinction."



An area of tropical forest five times the size of England has been destroyed since 2014, mainly to service the growing global demand for beef, biofuels, soy beans and palm oil

The pace of loss "is already tens to hundreds of times higher than it has been, on average, over the last 10 million years," it notes.

"Half-a-million to a million species are projected to be threatened with extinction, many within decades."

Experts on biodiversity are also trying to engineer a "Paris moment," something equivalent to the 2015 climate treaty that set a hard target for capping global warming at under two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit).

That could come next year in China at the next full meeting of the Convention on Biodiversity, they say.

But the plan to save Nature—and humanity along with it—must be every bit as "transformative" as the changes proposed to avert a [climate](#)-addled future of human misery, said Watson.

"The way we produce and use energy, with way we produce and waste food—all of that has to be looked at," he said.

"The global report will make the case that [biodiversity](#) is essential to a sustainable world and human well-being."

© 2019 AFP

Citation: In degrading Nature humanity harms itself, UN report warns (2019, April 25) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-04-degrading-nature-humanity.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.