

Fighting climate change, protecting nature go hand in hand

December 13 2019, by Laure Fillon



Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg gives a speech during at the COP25 climate change conference in Madrid where some say the struggle to protect nature needs to get more attention

The preservation of Earth's pristine wildernesses and oceans, long

treated as a separate issue to curbing climate change, is taking on more importance as scientists say they really need to go hand in hand.

The year 2020 will be crucial as nations submit their commitments to the fight to curb global warming ahead of the COP26 conference in Glasgow, Scotland.

At the same time, they will also be drawing up their plans for protecting biodiversity over the next decade in preparation for the COP15 summit in China.

While the focus at COP25 in Madrid these past two weeks has been on climate change and the growing urgency to cut greenhouse gas emissions, organisers have made an effort to put the natural environment into the mix.

COP25 chair Chile for example has put the stress on protecting our oceans, under threat on all fronts—pollution, acidification, coral loss, over-fishing to name a few.

"We cannot approach global problems in separate compartments, we must look for synergies," Andres Landerreche, coordinator for the Chilean conference presidency, told AFP.

"It is the first time (at a COP summit) that there are so many official events linked to bio-diversity," said Alexandra Deprez of the Institute for Durable Development and International Relations (IDDRI).

Climate change, nature linked

The link between [global warming](#) and biodiversity is and should be self-evident—climate change spells changing habitats and upheaval in the animal world, just as it will mean for mankind.

"The effects of climate change stoke the biodiversity crisis," said Grethel Aguilar, acting head of the International Union for Conservation (IUCN) whose Red List estimates 30 percent of all animals and plants to be at risk.

Yet, it is nature which may offer solutions to help tackle climate change, Aguilar says.

One of the best known examples is planting trees to help absorb some of the billions of tons of CO₂ being pumped out but it should not be seen as an easy pass on the pressing need to reduce our emissions outright.

Similarly, alternative fuels, such as those based on plants like maize can help—but they have a price in diverting food crops into energy.

Lola Vallejo, who runs IDDRI's climate programme, said the issue of bio-diversity was on the agenda and had attracted support from key countries such as France, China, Costa Rica or New Zealand.

At Madrid, there has been some meeting of minds on the idea of enlisting nature to combat climate change, which may prove better than some of the technological or engineering solutions suggested up to now.

It is also important not to think that such solutions absolve us of our responsibility on commitments to reduce [greenhouse gas emissions](#), said Karin Zaunberger of the European Commission.

"We have to be ambitious, unconventional and work together," Zaunberger said.

Li Shuo of Greenpeace International noted that the two conventions—on climate change and biodiversity—have different objectives and reflect different cultures.

"I can sum up the UN convention on [climate change](#) in one phrase—reduce CO2 emissions," Li said.

"But can I do the same for the Convention on Biological Diversity? No!"

The biodiversity convention seems to assume that the main task is fixing objectives without putting in place the actual means to achieve them, he said, while the Paris climate accord lays down exactly what steps need to be taken.

Zaunberger of the EU said there was some concern that the focus on [climate](#) risks bio-diversity getting forgotten.

For some, the answer is to combine the two conventions, along with a third perhaps on desertification.

"I do not know if they need to go that far but (the two sides) must at least really talk," said French Minister for Ecological and Inclusive Transition Elisabeth Borne.

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