

Environmentalists suggest COVID-19 could represent a new opportunity for a more diverse future

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A team of environmental researchers at the Australian Rivers Institute—Coast & Estuaries, School of Environment and Science,

Griffith University, is suggesting in a Letters piece in the journal *Science* that the COVID-19 pandemic could represent a new opportunity for a more diverse future—they suggest that with proper planning, we could use what has been learned from the global lockdown to improve global biodiversity.

As the global [pandemic](#) has kept millions of people the world over isolating in their homes, nature has reacted. Reports of wild animals roaming city streets and small towns alike have made headlines. Also, the air has become cleaner, and many cities have become quiet. Such changes have served as a reminder that humans are not the sole residents of planet Earth.

In their [paper](#), the team in Australia suggests that the changes we have observed might be presenting the world with a new opportunity to alter the ways that governments and environmentalists approach the issue of diversification as we move into a post-pandemic world. They note that history has shown that dramatic world events can lead to change—the Chernobyl meltdown in Ukraine, for example, led to humans abandoning huge swaths of land, allowing nature to take its course. The result has been the creation of a very large wilderness area now designated as an ecological reserve.

Another example was the Columbian conflict, which, for years, served as a protection zone for plants and animals because humans were afraid to venture into areas occupied by armed rebels. They suggest the lockdown effect could have a similar impact if long-term strategies are put in place to preserve the [positive changes](#) that nature has made, and to expand on them to increase biodiversity in other places.

The key, they claim, is for legislation protecting areas where biodiversity is present and to push for more areas to join them. They also note that the lockdown has coaxed people into rethinking some of their consumer

habits—and maybe to changing some as the pandemic ends. They argue that the pandemic could represent a tipping-point in how the human race views the planet. This could be a time for development of new strategies, they suggest, and to implement them—to tip the balance in favor of a more diverse, environmentally friendly planet.

More information: Jennifer Sills et al. COVID-19 recovery can benefit biodiversity, *Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.1126/science.abc1430](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abc1430)

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