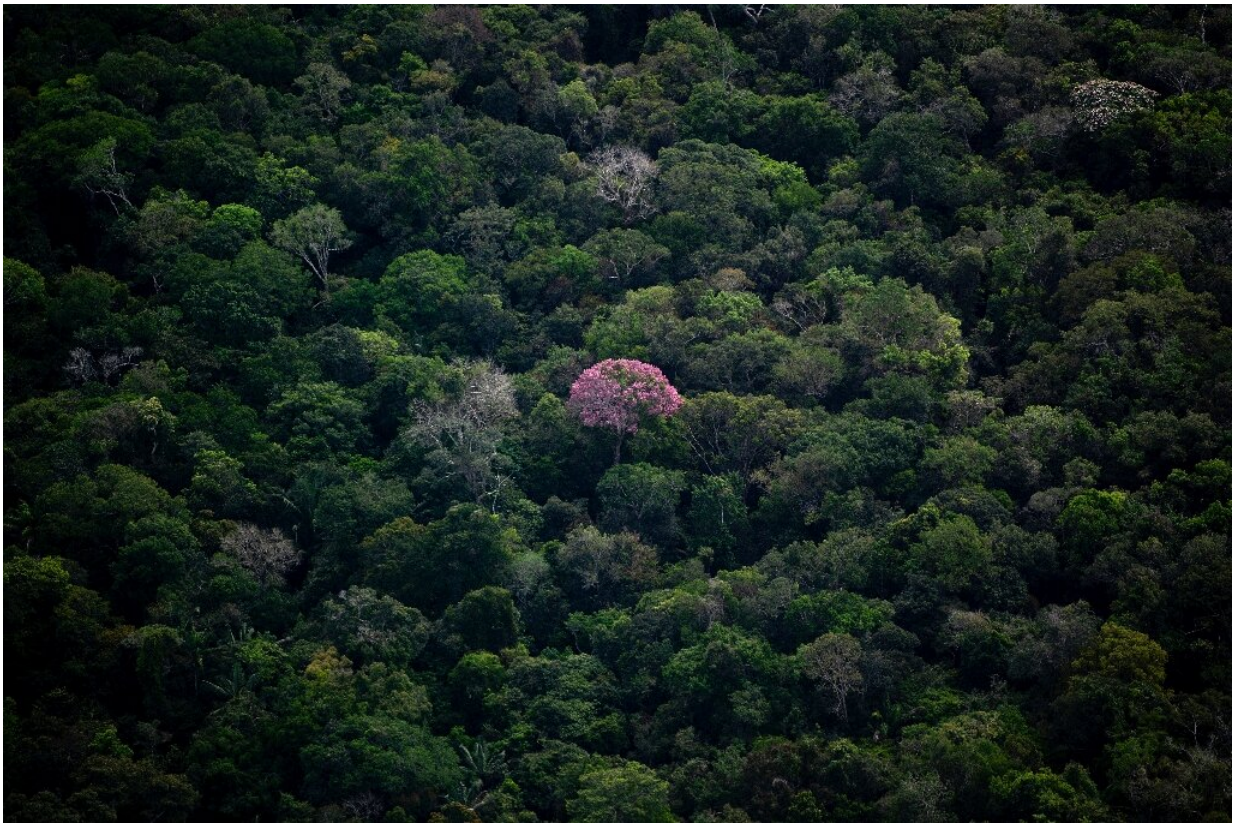


Biodiversity talks open as UN chief calls for 'peace pact' with nature

December 7 2022, by Benjamin LEGENDRE



Aerial view showing a tree with pink foliage sticking out in the Amazon rainforest in Amazonas State, Brazil.

High-stakes biodiversity talks opened in Montreal Wednesday, amid calls for a "peace pact with nature" to save the planet's species and

ecosystems from irreversible human destruction.

Delegates from across the world gathered for the December 7-19 meeting to try to hammer out a new deal for nature: a 10-year framework aimed at saving Earth's forests, oceans and species before it's too late.

"It's time for the world to adopt an ambitious biodiversity framework—a true peace pact with nature—to deliver a green, healthy future for all," UN chief Antonio Guterres told reporters.

Inger Andersen, head of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), urged negotiators to land a strong framework for nature. "Nature and biodiversity are dying the death of a billion cuts and humanity is paying the price for betraying our closest friend," she said.

The Ukraine conflict cast a shadow over early exchanges.

Representatives from the European Union and New Zealand, also speaking on behalf of other countries including the United States, slammed Russia for the environmental destruction brought about by its invasion.

Ukraine has said tens of thousands of dead dolphins have washed up on the Black Sea, blaming military sonar used by Russian warships for the disaster.



A grizzly bear looks for food as snow falls along the Denali Park Road in Denali National Park in Denali, Alaska.

Russia's representative fired back that the meeting was an inappropriate forum and accused its critics of hypocrisy for not raising previous conflicts—such as Iraq and Afghanistan—in the context of talks on nature.

Outside the downtown convention center where the talks were hosted, some 150 activists dressed in black demonstrated against what they called the hypocrisy of the summit, as riot police watched on.

'Significant resistance'

Draft targets for the 10-year framework include a cornerstone pledge to protect 30 percent of the world's land and seas by 2030, eliminating harmful fishing and agriculture subsidies and tackling invasive species and reducing pesticides.

Finance is among the most divisive issues, as developing nations are demanding increased funding for conservation.

Earlier this year, a coalition of nations called for wealthy countries to provide at least \$100 billion annually -- rising to \$700 billion a year by 2030—for biodiversity.



A southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) is photographed at La Cantera beach near Puerto Madryn, Chubut Province, Argentina.

Guterres told AFP: "It must be recognized that without a significant mobilization of funding, of various origins but with a substantial volume, developing countries will not be able to meet the requirements of biodiversity conservation.

"It should not be forgotten that most of the world's biodiversity wealth exists in developing countries."

The sticky issue of biopiracy is also causing roadblocks, as many mainly African countries demand that wealthy nations share the benefits of ingredients and formulas used in cosmetics and medicines derived from the Global South.

Implementation has emerged as another sticking point in recent days, with disagreements over how to ensure any final deal is put into practice—unlike its predecessor agreed in 2010.

'Flexibility, compromise, consensus'

The meeting, delayed two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic, follows crucial climate change talks in Egypt last month that ended with little headway on reducing emissions and scaling down the use of planet-warming fossil fuels.



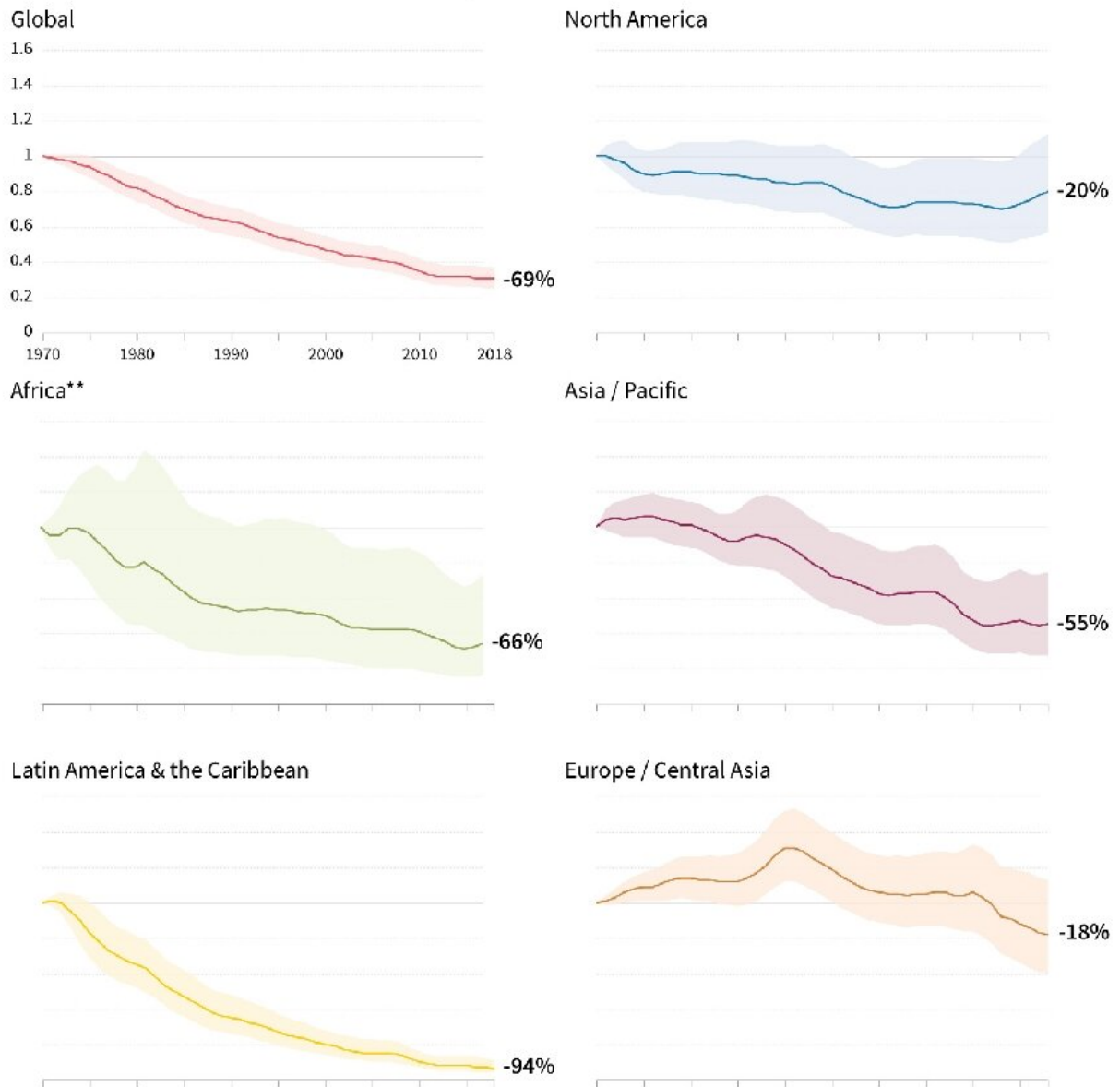
Cranes fly over pelicans feeding in the water at sunset at the "Ain Al-Shams" a seasonal lake within the Dinder National Park in Sudan.



A general view shows stars and trees of the Canadian boreal forest in the La Haute-Cote-Nord municipality west of Baie-Comeau, Quebec.

Biodiversity in peril: nearly 70% drop in wildlife populations

WWF's Living Planet Index 2022 shows "devastating" losses of monitored wildlife populations* between 1970 and 2018 due to human activity



Source: WWF Living Planet Report 2022 *32,000 populations of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians **data until 2017



Chart showing the 2022 global Living Planet Index, which shows a 69% decline of monitored wildlife populations, and charts by region.

China is chair, though it is being hosted in Canada because of Beijing's long-standing zero-COVID policy.

NGOs say the lack of world leaders at COP15 risks dampening momentum at the talks and could scupper an ambitious settlement.

Some 30 NGO observers marched in the corridors of the convention center, waving placards that read "Stop the collapse" and " Act now for a positive world."

Patricia Zurita, CEO of BirdLife International, told AFP "the conversation is not addressing the urgency, not pushing for the ambition that we really need to have to make sure that our planet is going to be a place where we can survive."

The talks come amid dire warnings from scientists that the world is facing its biggest mass extinction event since the dinosaur age, with more than one million species at risk.

Human activity has decimated forests, wetlands, waterways and the millions of plants, animals and insects that live in them, with half of global GDP in some way dependent on nature.

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