

Conservation of 'Nature's Strongholds' needed to halt biodiversity loss, say researchers

May 21 2024



In the Nature's Stronghold of Madidi, Bolivia: Multiple jurisdictions with Tacana and Lecos de Apolo Indigenous Territories in the foreground, and across the Tuichi River, the Madidi National Park. Credit: Omar Torrico (CC-BY 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

To achieve global biodiversity targets, conservationists and governments must prioritize the establishment and effective management of large, interconnected protected areas with high ecological integrity, John G. Robinson from the Wildlife Conservation Society, US, and colleagues argue in an essay published May 21 in the open-access journal *PLOS Biology*.

The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), signed at the 2022 Conference of Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal, recognized the importance of protecting large areas of natural habitat to maintain the resilience and integrity of ecosystems.

To halt [biodiversity loss](#), these protected and conserved areas need to be in the right places, connected to one another, and well managed. One of the GBF targets is to protect at least 30% of the global land and ocean by 2030, known as the 30x30 target.

To achieve GBF targets, the authors propose prioritizing large, interconnected protected areas with high ecological integrity, that are effectively managed and equitably governed. They emphasize the importance of conserving landscapes at scales large enough to encompass functioning ecosystems and the biodiversity they contain.

In many cases, this will require interconnected groups of protected areas that are managed together. Effective governance means that the diversity of stakeholders and rights holders is recognized and that the costs and benefits are shared equitably between them.

The authors argue that protected and [conservation areas](#) that meet all four criteria—which they name "Nature's Strongholds"—will be disproportionately important for biodiversity conservation. They identify examples of Nature's Strongholds in the high-biodiversity tropical forest

regions of Central Africa and the Amazon.



Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes troglodytes*) in Nouabalé-Ndoki in the Nature's Stronghold of Sangha Tri-National in Central Africa. Credit: Julie Larsen Maher (CC-BY 4.0, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

By applying the four criteria presented in this essay to identify Nature's Strongholds around the world, governments and [conservationists](#) can coordinate their efforts to best address threats to biodiversity, the authors say.

The authors add, "Nature's Strongholds—large, interconnected, ecologically intact areas that are well managed and equitably

governed—are identified in Amazonia and Central Africa. The approach offers an effective way to conserve biodiversity at a global scale."

More information: Robinson JG, LaBruna D, O'Brien T, Clyne PJ, Dudley N, Andelman SJ, et al. (2024) Scaling up area-based conservation to implement the Global Biodiversity Framework's 30x30 target: The role of Nature's Strongholds. *PLoS Biology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pbio.3002613](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3002613)

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Citation: Conservation of 'Nature's Strongholds' needed to halt biodiversity loss, say researchers (2024, May 21) retrieved 4 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-05-nature-strongholds-halt-biodiversity-loss.html>

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