

Biodiversity conservation should be a core value of China's 'Belt and Road Initiative'

18 January 2018, by Lindsay Brooke

Environment and conservation experts from the University of Nottingham Malaysia (UNMC) and the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC) are challenging decision-makers, infrastructure planners and conservationists to work together to mitigate the negative impacts of China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) and look for opportunities for biodiversity conservation.

The correspondence—"Biodiversity conservation needs to be a core value of China's 'Belt and Road Initiative'"—has been published in the academic journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*. It is authored by Dr. Alex Lechner and Dr. Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz from the School of Environmental and Geographical Sciences at UNMC (both are members of the Mindset Interdisciplinary Centre for Environmental Studies at UNMC) and Dr. Faith Ka Shun Chan from the School of Geographical Sciences, the co-leader of the Belt and Road Initiative Research Priorities Area, Institute of Asia Pacific Studies (IAPS) at UNNC.

The article highlights what the authors describe as the potentially disastrous consequences for [biodiversity](#) and calls for BRI to put [biodiversity conservation](#) at the heart of its core values—not as an after-thought. The authors suggest that BRI could, for instance, implement a network of protected areas and wildlife corridors across Eurasia.

With an estimated cost of over four trillion US dollars, BRI will connect roughly half of the world's population across over 65 countries. Although much has been discussed about its economic and geopolitical implications the research team warns that critical implications for biodiversity need to be considered, especially in Asia.

Biodiversity in the Anthropocene

The Anthropocene denotes the current geological age, which is viewed as the period during which

human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. Infrastructure and its impacts, such as disruption of ecological connectivity, are key drivers of [biodiversity loss](#) in the Anthropocene.

This article tracks the path BRI will take across a number of the world's terrestrial and marine biodiversity hotspots, wilderness areas and other key conservation areas—such as Southeast Asia's Coral Triangle, often described as the Amazon of the ocean.

Potential threats to biodiversity

The authors list the potential threats to biodiversity. Roads, they say, create habitat loss and fragmentation and encourage invasive species and illegal activities such as poaching and logging.

Increased sea traffic exacerbates the movement of invasive species and pollution.

Poorly planned infrastructure risks locking in undesirable environmental practices for decades to come.

Potential opportunity for biodiversity

There is, the authors say, a potential opportunity for biodiversity. BRI could learn from, support and expand existing national initiatives in the region such as Bhutan For Life or Malaysia's Central Forest Spine, and promote transboundary conservation parks and transboundary conservation activities as an integral element of transboundary infrastructure projects.

The authors want BRI to follow best practice environmental planning to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and achieve a net gain in biodiversity that yield benefits to [conservation](#) which would not have otherwise occurred.

The vision, they say, proposed in this paper should be led by Chinese authorities and diplomacy but will require clear buy-in and involvement from other countries' governments and different sectors and stakeholders, including intergovernmental organizations such as UNDP, financiers, developers, and civil society. The research team has already submitted a joint grant to the Chinese Social Science Foundation (CSSF) with partners at University of Beijing to further look at the implications and crossboundary effects on natural environment by BRI.

More information: Alex Mark Lechner et al.

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