

International Year of Biodiversity - investing in nature, improving lives

adapted from <http://www.iucn.org/iyb/>

On 11 Jan 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity got underway in Berlin, Germany by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Merkel cautioned that our Earth is facing “enormous costs” which will only go on increasing unless climate change is addressed and the decline of biodiversity is halted.

The global extinction crisis currently facing us will wipe out man himself along with natural environments; we all depend upon the Earth's natural components: species, subspecies, ecosystems, natural resources, etc. This has to be safeguarded before we saw off the branch of the tree upon which we sit. The Director General of IUCN, Julia Marton-Lefèvre, commented on managing natural resources for sustainable development, support of peaceful communities and promoting balanced economic growth to reduce poverty. Biodiversity is another asset that is crucial to the economy of the world.

The most recent assessments from the IUCN Red List of Threatened species gave up some interesting – and disturbing stats: 22 percent of all mammals, 30 percent of all amphibians, 12 percent of all birds, and 28 percent of reptiles, 37 percent of freshwater fish species, 70 percent of plants, 35 percent of invertebrates, those which have been assessed, are under threat of extinction.

It has been suggested that human activity has caused the current global rate of species extinction at 1000 times the natural rate of loss. As the goal to reduce biodiversity loss by 2010 was nowhere near being met, IUCN has called for stronger plans and actions, a CBD to save life on earth itself.

Director of IUCN Biodiversity Conservation Group, Dr. Jane Smart commented on the occasion “We are facing an extinction crisis. “We need to remember that extinction is irreversible, once a species is extinct it is gone forever. The loss of this beautiful and complex natural diversity that underpins all life on the planet is a serious threat to humankind now and in the future.”

Thus IUCN urges more realistic biodiversity goals ... goals which are “do-able” but also determined.

There should also be increased research on biodiversity status, increase protected areas, and a closer association with commercial interests to generate a means of making commerce work for conservation instead of against. We also need more public awareness of the big picture and its implications so that more people will work harder to bring about change.

Neville Ash, Head of Ecosystem Management Programme of IUCN commented: “Biodiversity is the basis of all life on earth. We need practical action and supportive policies to conserve species, manage and restore ecosystems, including protected areas and the wider landscape, and promote the sustainable use of natural resources.”

Towards a diverse and sustainable world

IUCN invites you to join them in celebrating the beginning of the next decade by participating fully in the International Year of Biodiversity, declared by the United Nations. IUCN will celebrate biological diversity throughout the year, stressing its variety, expressed in its critical importance for life on earth. Human beings may realize and enjoy the richness of nature and its attractiveness but relatively few accept the reality of the current crisis or how it can affect the quality of life and ultimately life itself for them and their children.

The crisis and its implications are so off-putting that to accept this reality is not how people want to start their day. Even people immersed in it adopt a pie in the sky attitude, thinking a few words or brochures will convince and change public attitudes. Everyone with an inkling of the implications of declining biodiversity needs to make this a priority in their lives by practicing and preaching the facts of it. Organisations like IUCN deliver the information that we need in order to change our own attitudes and behavior as well as that of others. Practising works better than preaching ... changing your own habits and life-style speaks louder than any teaching.

IUCN together with its Members and partners wants to see biodiversity at the top of the global agenda, leading to stronger action from all sectors



of society including government and industry to safeguard it. To do this we have to show how biodiversity is essential for sustaining our natural living systems—or ecosystems—that provide us with clean air and water, food, building materials, fuel and medicine.

We humans are part of biodiversity just like plants, vertebrate and invertebrate animals, fungi, but human beings are the only animal which has such power and resources to obliterate the natural world, or such crassness not to care, even when presented with incontrovertible evidence. Human evolution and achievement has been immense ... but humans, in making themselves comfortable and (seemingly) secure have done their environment from local to global and their progeny a great disservice. As IUCN says "our activities are destroying the natural world at an unprecedented rate through climate change, habitat destruction, over-harvesting, pollution" and have brought about a global species extinction crisis.

One of the many problems of trying to change attitudes and behavior of human beings with regard to biodiversity is our immersion in modern life, in which we have lost touch with biodiversity ... our food, clothing, power, transportation, medicine, is available to us at the touch of a button or exchange of cash. We can't see and feel the

impact of biodiversity loss in an immediate sense, such as is described so eloquently by IUCN: *...when we fell a mature tree to make a table, we lose a host of lichens and invertebrates; part of an entire web of life is lost. Yet people in the developing world know exactly what's at stake as they set out each morning to gather fuel wood from a dwindling forest, travel ever further to hunt animals for food and collect medicinal plants to treat their sick children.*

As conservation conscious people, even if we do not practice perfectly what we know to be the right thing, we must always look for better ways to care for the earth and to evolve (or devolve) our habits more toward sustaining rather than consuming. In 2010 many of us will be searching and employing better methods of convincing ourselves and others to modify their lifestyle. Organisations like IUCN, CBSG, WAZA, CBD Secretariat, and a host of others have wonderful resources for making a case for change. All of them are available on the internet.

If you do not have direct access to the internet in your workplace and home, invest in your future by visiting browsing centres regularly to investigate the most recent directions of our globally common problems and our most workable solutions, of which every individual is a part.

Message from IUCN President

India's own Ashok Khosla

Dr. Ashok Khosla, head of the first office of environment in the Government of India and now Director of Developmental Alternatives in New Delhi and world-renowned expert in many environmental and related fields is President of IUCN for the current quadrennium. It is a great honor for India to have the IUCN Presidency in the International Year of Biodiversity.

IUCN President Ashok Khosla has placed a message for us all on his website with a moving slide presentation. His message :

Have a GREAT Year . . . and a TRULY Transformative Decade!

Together, we can make it happen!

Please check:
<http://www.khosla.in/2010NY-EN.aspx>
to view the presentation.



**Chairing the Meeting on
Emerging Environmental
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