

## Climate change could wipe out more than half of African birds, mammals by 2100: biodiversity report

Robert Watson (third from right), president of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, speaks during the launch of the U.N. biodiversity body's regional assessment reports on biodiversity and ecosystem services in Oslo on March 23, 2018. Photo: Twitter/@IPBES

Humanity is risking its own well-being by over-harvesting and harming Nature's bounty, said a comprehensive survey on March 23 that warned animal and plant species were in decline in every world region.

Four mammoth reports that took more than 550 scientists three years to compile, warned that Asia-Pacific fish stocks could run out by 2048 and more than half of African bird and mammal species could be lost by 2100.

Up to 90% of Asia-Pacific corals will suffer "severe degradation" by 2050, said the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

"This alarming trend endangers economies, livelihoods, food security and the quality of life of people everywhere," according to the most extensive biodiversity survey since 2005. "We're undermining our own future well-being," added IPBES chairman Robert Watson.

The IPBES brought together experts from around the globe to assess four world regions: the Americas, Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia — all the planet except for the Antarctic and the open seas. The volunteers combed through some 10,000 scientific publications.

After days of intense word-by-word negotiations, envoys from the IPBES' 129 member countries approved summaries of the four reports, which will guide governments in policy-making. IPBES is modelled on the U.N. panel on climate change, which advises governments on ways to tackle global warming.

The texts make for grim reading.

Unless humanity reverses its unsustainable use of nature, we risk "not only the future we want, but even the lives we currently lead", said Mr. Watson. "If we continue the way we are... the sixth mass extinction, the first one ever caused by humans will continue," he told AFP.

Scientists say mankind's voracious consumption of biodiversity has unleashed the first mass species die-off since the demise of the dinosaurs — only the sixth on our planet in half-a-billion years. Two species of vertebrates — animals with a backbone — have gone extinct every year on average for the past century. Just this week, the [death of Sudan — the world's last northern white rhino male](#) — served as a stark reminder of the stakes.

For the Americas, the survey warned that species populations — already 31% smaller than when the first European settlers arrived — will have shrunk by about 40% by 2050.

An estimated 500,000 sq. km of African land is estimated to be degraded, added the assessment. As the continent's population doubles to 2.5 billion by 2050, further pressure will be brought to bear.

The Asia-Pacific region's biodiversity faces "unprecedented threats", said the IPBES reports, "from

extreme weather events and sea level rise, to invasive alien species, agricultural intensification and increasing waste and pollution”.

In the European Union, meanwhile, only 7% of marine species assessed had a “favourable conservation status”.

In many places of the world, climate change driven by mankind’s burning of fossil fuels for energy, was worsening biodiversity loss, the reports found. “This is what we’ve got to get across to policy makers: we have to look at climate change and biodiversity together,” Mr. Watson said.

“Climate change affects biodiversity, changes in our natural vegetation affects climate change. And both of them, if we don’t do this correctly, will undermine many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: clean water for everyone, food security for people, energy security, human security, equity.”

The hurdles are many.

“Economic growth is going to continue. Population growth is going to continue to 2050, therefore demand for resources will grow,” said the IPBES chairman.

Even at best-case-scenario levels, global warming will continue adding to species loss, which will cause further degradation of ecosystems.

But the scientists do point to possible solutions: creating more protected areas, restoring degraded zones, and rethinking subsidies that promote unsustainable agriculture.

Crucially, governments, businesses, and individuals must integrate biodiversity considerations in all decisions: whether it concerns farming, fishing, forestry, mining, or infrastructure development.

Ending food waste — as much as 40% of all that is produced — is also key. If this can be achieved, food production may not need to double to meet the population explosion predicted.

Consumers, too, must be more responsible, by reducing their intake of meat — a resource-hungry and polluting protein resource — for example. Different regions will require different solutions, said Mr. Watson, adding: “It’s not too late” to halt, or even reverse, some of the harm. “Can we stop all of it? No. Can we significantly slow it down? Yes,” he concluded.

The IPBES will bring out a fifth report on the global state of soil, fast being degraded through pollution, forest-destruction, mining, and unsustainable farming methods that deplete its nutrients.

Among other economic estimates, the Africa report said the absorption of greenhouse gases by a hectare (2.5 acres) of forest in Central Africa was worth \$14,000 a year.

Around the world, ever more animals and plants were under threat, ranging from elephants in Africa to rare mosses in Europe. More than half of African bird and mammal species could be lost to climate change by 2100, it said. “By 2100, climate change could ... result in the loss of more than half of African bird and mammal species,” said Emma Archer of South Africa, the co-chair of the African assessment.

For pollution, eight of 10 rivers around the world with most plastic waste were in Asia. On current trends, overfishing meant there could be no exploitable fish stocks in the Asia-Pacific region by mid-century.

Last three years hottest on record: UN

Rising human populations in many developing nations would require new policies both to protect nature and to meet U.N. goals to eradicate poverty and hunger by 2030.

In Europe and Central Asia, wetlands have declined by half since 1970. The average ecological footprint — or land needed per person for a sustainable environment — was 5.1 hectares against an available 2.2.

Amid the gloom, there were some bright spots.

Forest cover had risen by 22.9% in China and other nations in northeast Asia between 1990 and 2015. Parks and other protected areas were expanding in many regions, including the Americas and Asia-Pacific. And populations of animals such as the Iberian lynx, Amur tiger and far eastern leopard were coming back from the brink of extinction thanks to conservation.

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