

• 06 December 2022

World leaders must step up to put biodiversity deal on path to success

Ahead of the COP15 biodiversity meeting, few disagree that we must do more to protect nature — but money, underwritten by top-level support, is needed to make it happen.



Pristine ecosystems such as mangrove forests protect against the effects of climate change. Credit: Karine Aigner/Nature Picture Library

The Paris climate agreement, signed in December 2015, ranks as one of the most momentous global treaties ever

negotiated, setting a crucial goal to seek to limit warming to 1.5–2 °C above pre-industrial levels. At the time, the opening ceremony of the COP21 climate-change conference that led to the agreement also held the record for the largest number of world leaders ever to attend a United Nations event in a single day — more than 150. The two things are probably more than coincidence.

Now biodiversity is hoping for its Paris moment. The long-delayed COP15 conference, starting on 7 December in Montreal, Canada, aims to seal a bold new international deal committing countries to precise targets to curb species loss and to protect and restore nature.

Many factors suggest the time is ripe. The problem of biodiversity loss is more prominent than ever before. As ecologist Sandra Díaz wrote in *Nature* last week, researchers have assembled the strongest evidence base yet ahead of COP15, the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity ([S. Díaz *Nature* 612, 9; 2022](#)). Initiatives such as the [Dasgupta Review](#), commissioned by the UK government, have made plain that the protection of biodiversity is an economic necessity.



COP15 biodiversity plan risks being alarmingly diluted

There is also much greater public awareness of how pollution and habitat destruction threaten the health of ecosystems on which we depend for food, clean water and disease prevention, and a better understanding of nature's crucial role in mitigating climate change — for example, by storing carbon in soils and trees — as well as in helping us to adapt to its impacts. Mangrove forests, for instance, are hugely effective in stopping influxes of seawater from tsunamis and sea-level rise.

But when it comes to getting stalled negotiations motoring again, the scale of support by world leaders that was a feature of climate's road to Paris is currently lacking.

Change cannot come too soon. Nature is on the brink. Of 20 decadal targets to preserve nature that were set in Aichi, Japan, in 2010, not a single one had been fully met by 2020. That, coupled with underfunding and lack of regard for the rights of Indigenous peoples who steward much of the world's remaining biodiversity, means more species than ever are at risk of extinction. Serious impacts on human wealth and health from biodiversity loss loom ever larger. Yet over the past three years, four difficult rounds of negotiations aiming to agree on a framework to replace Aichi have not yielded results. Hundreds of issues remain unresolved.



COVID delays are frustrating the world's plans to save biodiversity

Many experts worry that [the lacklustre progress made at COP27](#), the climate summit held last month in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, augur badly for the biodiversity meeting. But there is also reason for hope. The agreement made at COP27 to establish a 'loss and damage' fund to compensate low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) for climate impacts indicates that richer nations are open to talking about funding, which has also been a major sticking point in biodiversity negotiations.

Global funding for biodiversity is severely in the red. A [UN estimate published last week](#) suggests that only US\$154 billion per year flows to 'nature-based solutions' from all sources, including government aid and private investment — a number the UN says needs to triple by 2030. Many LMICs — which are home to much of the world's remaining biodiversity — would like rich nations to put fresh finance into a new multilateral fund. One option is that such a fund could compensate LMICs for bio-diversity loss and associated damages driven by the consumption of products in rich nations through international trade.

A second major sticking point is how to fairly and equitably share the benefits of digital sequence information — genetic data collected from plants, animals and other organisms. Communities in biodiversity-rich regions where genetic material is

collected have little control over the commercialization of the data, and no way to recoup financial or other benefits. A multipurpose fund for bio-diversity could provide a simple and effective way to share the benefits of these data and support other conservation needs of LMICs.

Another reason to hope for a breakthrough is the forthcoming change in Brazil's leadership. Conservation organizations such as the wildlife charity WWF have accused the world's most biodiverse nation of deliberately obstructing previous negotiations, holding up agreement on targets such as protecting at least 30% of the world's land and seas by 2030. But Brazil's incoming president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, has signalled that the environment is one of his top priorities. Although he does not take over until January 2023, he is thought to be sending an interim team of negotiators to Montreal.



Crucial biodiversity summit will go ahead in Canada, not China: what scientists think

All negotiators face a Herculean task to get a deal over the line at COP15, with many issues in the text still unresolved and contested. What's needed above all is global leadership to empower national negotiators to reach a strong deal, including a new fund of some kind for biodiversity. More than 90 heads of state and heads of government have signed a pledge to tackle the nature crisis. At the time of writing, only Justin Trudeau, the host nation's prime minister, has confirmed that he is to attend in person.

The no-shows send the wrong signal. It's also true at the time of writing that neither Canada nor China — the original intended host of COP15 and still the meeting's chair — has issued formal invitations. But leaders have

regularly attended climate COPs for more than a decade. This shows in the ambition of climate agreements, if not in their implementation. Research communities and civil society must continue to pressure leaders to engage similarly with the biodiversity agenda. Otherwise, the world risks failing to grasp this opportunity to secure the kind of ambitious deal that nature — and humanity — desperately needs.

Nature **612**, 189-190 (2022)

doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-022-04329-5>