

Science for Environment Policy

A nation's conservation success cannot be predicted by its wealth

Wealthier nations protect biodiversity no better than poorer nations, suggests new research. The study found no link between national GDP and the effectiveness of countries at conserving the species for which they have responsibility.

5 March 2015
Issue 406

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Source: Rodrigues, A.S.L., Brooks, T.M., Butchart, S.H.M., *et al.* (2014). Spatially Explicit Trends in the Global Conservation Status of Vertebrates. *PLoS One* 9(11), e113934.

DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0113934. This study is free to view at:

<http://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0113934>

Contact:
ana.rodrigues@cefe.cnrs.fr

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To cite this article/service: "Science for Environment Policy": European Commission DG Environment News Alert Service, edited by SCU, The University of the West of England, Bristol.

In 2002, through the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), 193 national governments committed to achieving a 'significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss' by 2010. However, despite conservation efforts, an increase in threats to [biodiversity](#) meant that this target was missed.

In response, a new target was adopted for 2020 at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan. This target aims to prevent the extinction of known threatened species and to improve and sustain their conservation status, focusing on those species most in decline.

Now, with five years left until the 2020 target, the new research attempted to quantify the contribution of different countries and regions to recent global trends in conservation status to help guide action towards the 2020 goals.

The research combined countries' economic data with data on the global spread of 21,316 species (9800 birds, 5393 mammals and 6123 amphibians) and recent changes to their International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List status between two time points: 1988 and 2008 for birds; 1996 and 2008 for mammals; and 1980 and 2004 for amphibians.

The researchers also considered factors which affect conservation status, such as species range and the dominant threats faced in each country, such as invasive species or [land use](#) change.

They found no link between a country's per capita GDP and its relative performance in preventing the degradation of its species' Red List status. Australia and the United States — two of the richest nations — were among the worst performers, while poorer nations including Madagascar and Tanzania were among the best.

This research did not examine conservation spending by country. However, their findings, the study's authors say, suggest that economic development does not guarantee a nation's effectiveness in conserving biodiversity.

Nearly all countries and regions were found to have contributed to negative global biodiversity trends. Eight countries — which host more than 33% of the world's biodiversity — were found to be responsible for 53% of losses in conservation status across all species; these were Australia, China, Columbia, Ecuador, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico and the United States.

The best performers, who achieved a net improvement in conservation status, were small island nations including the Cook Islands, Fiji, Mauritius, Seychelles and Tonga.

The main threats to biodiversity differ between countries, and present their own unique challenges for conserving biodiversity. For example, agriculture and logging were found to be the major contributors to the deterioration in species' conservation status in south-east Asia, while invasive species were the main factor in the United States and Australia.

The study concludes that, within each country, conservation needs more investment and needs to be implemented strategically. Each country should focus on species for which it is solely, or mostly, globally accountable and target sites where conservation can make the most difference, it recommends. Additionally, countries will have to focus on the specific types of threats driving biodiversity loss within their own borders.

