

Statement by Elizabeth Maruma Mrema
Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity
on the occasion of
World Wildlife Day
3 March 2022

Recovering key species for ecosystem restoration

Some species are so critically important to the health and resilience of their ecosystems that their absence greatly affects that ecosystems' integrity.

Beavers, for example, are mighty ecosystem engineers. Meticulous stewards of their lands, they have a close evolutionary relationship with the plants in their environment. Each species is interdependent on one another, each contributes to ecosystem resilience. Beavers help modify their territory by providing essential components for restoring riparian corridors, thus securing the foundation of resilient ecosystems crucial to the mitigation of climate and land-use changes.

2021-2030 is the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, with the goal to prevent, halt and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide. Restoring ecosystems is not only fundamental to achieving biodiversity conservation but is essential for ensuring water and food security, eradicating poverty, and reducing the impacts of climate change. For example, healthy wetland ecosystems provide people with clean water, provide nurseries for aquatic life upon which local communities depend, and act as critical carbon sinks serving both adaptation and mitigation.

Restoring converted lands in priority areas worldwide could avoid 60 per cent of expected extinctions, while simultaneously working to sequester significant amounts of CO₂ in our fight against climate change. When ecosystem restoration is effectively implemented, with the support of local populations, decades of biodiversity degradation can be reversed. The resulting positive impacts on the associated ecosystem services can boost local economies and help alleviate poverty.

Humanity has a social, cultural, economic and environmental interdependence with endangered species which may be lost if those species are left to go extinct. We must support and protect all communities from that risk, especially those most vulnerable. Accordingly, we must recognize and rely on the knowledge and leadership of indigenous peoples and local communities, who have been maintaining healthy ecosystems for generations and whose knowledge is key to halting and reversing biodiversity loss.

As the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity enter the final discussions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, set to be agreed later this year in Kunming, China,

we have an opportunity to showcase the great importance of maintaining and restoring key species to ensure the health and recovery of our ecosystems.

The current draft of the post-2020 framework includes a target specifically focused on ecosystem restoration. The first component of this target addresses the need to restore freshwater, marine and terrestrial ecosystems through restoration, rehabilitation and ecological integrity. The second component of the target focuses on connectivity, highlighting the importance of allowing the unimpeded movement of species.

The continued loss of wild plant and animal species poses an existential threat to people and the planet. Wildlife extinction threatens the vibrant and diverse ecosystems on Earth upon which we all depend.

On this World Wildlife Day, let us realise that we have all the tools necessary to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. What we must do now is work together to galvanise into action the restoration of threatened species and their habitats to change the course of our collective future and achieve the 2050 Vision of living in harmony with nature.