

Nature on life support

Oceans full of plastic, polluted rivers, rainforests burned and cleared, fish stocks vanishing, reefs badly damaged. Nature is in bad shape and it affects all of us. But there is hope. Expanding protected areas, improving food and agricultural practices, reducing water consumption and other steps can start to halt the decline, scientists say. Cutting greenhouse gas emissions heating up the planet is also vital; climate change is one of the greatest threats to nature.

⚠️ WHY IS NATURE IMPORTANT?

• Without nature, there will be no water to drink, no clean air to breathe, no food to grow or fish in the sea. Nature is the backbone of our livelihoods and economies. So healthy rivers and seas and forests are vital.

• This year, the World Economic Forum's annual global risk report identified biodiversity loss, in addition to climate change, as one of the most urgent threats, saying that "human-driven nature and biodiversity loss is threatening life on our planet".



The area of the Earth's land surface that has been significantly altered by human actions, including the loss of 85 per cent of the area of wetlands.



The area of the world's oceans experiencing impacts from people, including from fisheries, pollution and chemical changes from acidification.



The percentage of coral reefs globally destroyed if global average temperatures rise by 2 deg C above pre-industrial levels.

One million

The number of species threatened with extinction, unless mankind makes urgent changes to economies and the way goods are produced and consumed.

US\$500 billion (S\$684 billion)

The amount of government financial support annually that is potentially environmentally harmful, from fossil fuel subsidies to land clearing, says a report by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). It says subsidies for production of commodities linked to forest destruction in Brazil and Indonesia alone were estimated in 2015 to exceed by a factor of 100 or more the amount spent on measures to combat deforestation.



Burnt areas of the Amazon rainforest near Porto Velho in Brazil's Rondonia state last year.

TARGETS WAY OFF TRACK

In 2010, world nations agreed on 20 targets, called the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, that aimed to arrest the decline of nature, from forests to reefs to fish stocks, by this year. The targets were agreed on under the CBD. In a progress report on the targets in September 2020, the CBD concluded progress has been far too little and that only six of the targets were partially achieved and none were fully achieved.

THE CBD SAYS THERE HAS BEEN SOME PROGRESS:

The rate of deforestation has fallen globally by about a third compared with the previous decade.

Protected areas on land increased during the 2000-2020 period from about 10 per cent to at least 15 per cent and from about 3 per cent to at least 7 per cent in marine areas.

Almost 100 countries have incorporated biodiversity values into national accounting systems.

BIODIVERSITY AND COVID-19

Destroying ecosystems, such as rainforests, also places humans in closer contact with animals and diseases that can spread to humans, such as Sars.



Central Industrial Security Force personnel planting saplings during an annual tree-planting festival on the outskirts of Amritsar in India in July.

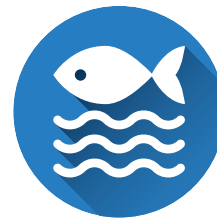
SOLUTIONS



Let forests grow back naturally - this also helps soak up planet-warming carbon dioxide.



Large-scale tree-planting of native species. Carefully planned, this can provide homes for birds, insects and other animals and cool local temperatures.



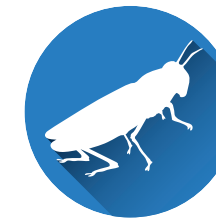
Impose strict quotas on the amount of fish caught and crack down on illegal fishing to allow fish stocks to recover.



Reduce pesticide and fertiliser use through more efficient and environmentally friendly farming practices that also reduce land degradation.



End subsidies to damaging industries such as coal mining and oil and gas extraction.



Expand protected areas, curb hunting and control invasive species.