

What lives below? The soil is alive!

**A public awareness event
organised by the European Commission on the occasion of the
International Day for Biological Diversity, 22nd May 2008,
at the Ninth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)**

Forenzelt "Campus", Plaza der Vielfalt (in front of the Maritim Hotel), Bonn, Germany

Introduction

The European Commission has adopted, in September 2006, a Thematic Strategy for the protection of soil (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/soil/index.htm>) with the objective of preventing further soil degradation, preserving soil functions and restoring degraded soils to a level of functionality consistent at least with current and intended use.

The strategy identifies a certain number of soil degradation processes, including the loss of soil biodiversity, that should be prevented and minimised to the extent possible. It also underlines that there is little public awareness of the importance of soil protection.

Therefore, the European Commission intends to profit from the ninth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) taking place in Bonn to emphasise the importance of soil biodiversity. The message that the European Commission wishes to communicate to the public in an engaging manner is the amazing world of soil biodiversity, the crucial role played by soil biology in sustaining life on the planet, the wide range of goods and services a healthy soil provides us with, and hence the need to protect soil biodiversity and to use it in a more sustainable way.

Structure of the event

The event proposed is divided into two parts, both taking place on Thursday 22nd May in the Forenzelt "Campus", Plaza der Vielfalt, in front of the Maritim Hotel in Bonn where the CBD meeting takes place.

The **first part** will run from 9.30 until 10.30 and will consist of a series of short, lively and interactive presentations by leading European experts who will tell us why we should care so much about the millions of tiny bugs and worms present in our soils:

Chair: Mr Ladislav Miko, Director for Nature, European Commission

<i>Time</i>	<i>Title of presentation</i>	<i>Speaker</i>
9.30-9.45	Soil biodiversity: the biological engine of the earth	Professor Karl Ritz, Cranfield University, United Kingdom
9.45-10.00	Life underground: 24 hours in the life of a worm	Professor Gabriele Broll, University of Vechta, Germany
10.00-10.15	Out of sight, out of mind? How to measure what you can't see	Dr Paul Stegmann, University of Applied Sciences, Osnabrück, Germany
10.15-10.30	From science to policy: how do we protect soil biodiversity?	Mr Reinhard Gierse, European Land and Soil Alliance, City of Wuppertal, Germany

The **second part** will run from 10.30 until 18.00 and is specifically targeted to families and children who will be invited to explore the theme "*What lives below? The soil is alive!*", through a series of hands-on exhibits that will allow exploring different aspects of soil biodiversity. These include:

- * Microscopes and viewsopes to show what really goes on in the soil
- * 'Creature tanks' showing what can fall into soil traps during the night
- * How to identify 'invisible' soil microbes by what they breathe out (CO₂ experiment)
- * Learn how to use earthworms as an indicator of soil quality
- * Special 'edible earthworms' exhibit
- * Exchange a painting of life in the soil for a unique EU Soil Biodiversity Tee-shirt.

In addition, a series of explanatory posters and videos explaining life in the soil will be shown.

The objective is to inform the public that soil is not just "dirt" but a medium that thrives with life, from micro-organisms invisible to the naked eye to bigger organisms, thereby raising awareness about the importance of keeping a healthy ecosystem in which soil biodiversity will be able to play its fundamental role.

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