



Island Biodiversity

Protecting Paradise on Earth

Islands constitute unique ecosystems and are often home to many plant and animal species found nowhere else. Irreplaceable treasures, these ecosystems are key to the livelihood, economy, well-being and cultural identity of 600 million islanders—one-tenth of the world's population. The isolation of island species exerts unique evolutionary forces that result in a distinct genetic reservoir and the emergence of highly specialized species with new characteristics and unusual adaptations of great value to humanity. Population sizes tend to be limited, with species often concentrated in small confined areas.

Islands comprise up to 30% of the world's conservation hotspots—of the 724 recorded animal extinctions in the last 400 years, about half were island species. At least 90% of the bird species that have become extinct in that period were island-dwellers. Over the past century, island biodiversity has been subject to intense pressure from invasive alien species, habitat change and over-exploitation, and, increasingly, from climate change and pollution. Islands are the canary in the goldmine in terms of our capacity to manage biodiversity loss from climate change: if we succeed in adaptation and mitigation there, we will be able to do it elsewhere.

This pressure is keenly felt by island economies, heavily dependent on biodiversity through fishing, agriculture and tourism. Among the most vulnerable of the developing countries, Small Island Developing States depend on the conservation and sustainable use of island biodiversity for their sustainable development, but many developed countries manage precious island ecosystems in their overseas territories, which share many of the same challenges.

Why it is important:

- Many islanders derive much of their economic, environmental and cultural well-being directly or indirectly from the rich natural resources in their immediate environment
- Islands harbour numerous fragile ecosystems, from mountain forests to wetlands and beyond, that provide food, fresh water, wood, fibre, medicines, fuel, tools and other important raw materials
- Island ecosystems provide defence against natural disasters, support nutrient cycling, and soil and sand formation; and contribute to the regulation of climate and diseases
- Island economies are among the most vulnerable of the developing countries, considering the relative lack of economic alternatives available
- Continental shelves and coastal ecosystems of many SIDS are economically significant for settlement, subsistence and commercial agriculture, fisheries and tourism
- Coral reefs provide an estimated US\$ 375 billion per year in goods and services.

What the CBD is doing:

At its eighth meeting (Brazil, March 2006), the Conference of the Parties adopted the first-ever programme of work dedicated solely to the uniqueness and fragility of island biodiversity, with an aim to reduce significantly the rate of island biodiversity loss by 2010 and beyond as a contribution to poverty alleviation and the sustainable development of islands, particularly Small Island Developing States. The



programme of work sets out almost 50 island-specific priority actions arranged under 11 goals, which are in turn organized under seven focal areas:

1. Protect the components of biodiversity
2. Promote sustainable use
3. Address threats to biodiversity
4. Maintain goods and services from biodiversity to support human well-being
5. Protect traditional knowledge and practices
6. Ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of genetic resources
7. Ensure provision of adequate resources

At COP 8, Parties adopted a programme to significantly reduce the rate of island biodiversity loss by 2010 and beyond. The Island Biodiversity programme will be examined in Bonn, through the Global Islands Partnership, an open platform where 20 CBD Parties and 25 international organizations challenge each other in establishing marine and terrestrial protected areas (such as the Micronesia Challenge and the Caribbean Initiative), stopping invasive alien species, promoting sustainable development and generating a database on island biodiversity.

For more information:

Island Biodiversity: www.cbd.int/island

COP decisions: www.cbd.int/island/decisions.shtml

Tools and Guidelines: www.cbd.int/island/tools.shtml



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Convention on Biological Diversity

