

Roadmap for EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030



Eurogroup for Animals' comments

Eurogroup for Animals welcomes the drafting of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 as a key delivery of the EU Green Deal.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Global Assessment Report published in May 2019 confirmed that biodiversity is declining globally at unprecedented rates¹. In the EU alone, unsustainable intensification of agriculture and fisheries have left only 23% of protected species and 16% of protected habitats in good conservation, and therefore sustainable, status. Clearly, EU efforts to avert global biodiversity loss by 2020, as required by Target 6 of the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy, have failed to meet their objective.

The recent COVID-19 outbreak has dramatically shown that the growing exploitation of wild animals for domestic and international trade places biodiversity under unsustainable pressure² and results in increased risks to animal welfare and human and animal health. A recent paper says an estimated 1.6 million viral species are yet to be discovered in mammal and bird populations; of those, an estimated 650,000 to 840,000 have the capacity to infect and cause disease in humans³. However, wild animals have carried viruses and bacteria for millennia. What has changed is the way humans interact with them, due to urbanisation, the destruction of wildlife's natural habitats, and the growing legal and illegal wildlife trade.

There's no time left for political disengagement and lack of commitment: the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy must be *the* tool to make the change needed to reverse biodiversity loss, also by securing adequate financial resources and adopting necessary new legislation. In order to ensure a real "green recovery", the EU must turn the present crisis into an opportunity and reverse the paradigm that prizes economic growth at any cost.

Eurogroup for Animals considers that the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 should include clear commitment to address the issues detailed below.

Fighting wildlife trafficking and the unregulated wildlife trade

The exploitation of animals and plants, including for unsustainable and illegal trade, is a key driver of biodiversity decline, as identified by the 2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report. Following the emergency of the COVID-19 pandemic, experts around the world have highlighted an additional warning: future pandemics are likely to be more frequent, spread more rapidly, kill more people and inflict even worse economic damage if we don't change the way we are destroying the environment and exploiting wildlife.

¹ <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment-report-biodiversity-ecosystem-services>

² <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

³ <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6378/872>

This is not only an admonishment for Asian countries, where COVID-19 and previous coronavirus epidemics have emerged. The EU is a main destination for live wild animals, including primates, reptiles, and amphibians. In 2018, the reported value of illegal wildlife trade in the EU was at least EUR 2.3 million⁴. Illegally smuggled animals are likely to have been transported in close confinement in unsanitary conditions and so also present a very clear risk of zoonosis infection. Thousands of wild animal species are also legally traded, at a much higher economic value, transported and kept as pets in EU citizens' homes, with no sanitary control.

It's crucial that the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 initiates a transformative change to tackle this issue head-on. The EU should maintain and straighten its global leadership role in continuing to fight against wildlife trafficking.

Actions to combat the illegal wildlife trade must be fully integrated in the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. The European Commission's EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking adopted in 2016 will end in 2020. **Eurogroup for Animals urges the Commission to renew and strengthen its provisions. The post-2020 Action Plan against wildlife trafficking should be fully integrated into the 2030 Biodiversity Strategy and receive adequate funding.**

Through its participation in global fora like CITES, the EU should make sure **to support non-consumptive uses of natural resources**, including wildlife, for the sustainable socioeconomic development of local communities.

Particularly, the extraction of wildlife for the pet trade, with the EU as a main market, often has dramatic consequences on the home environment of those species, in many cases contributing to deforestation and forest degradation. For example, the survival of the Barbary macaque is vital to the survival of the mixed forests of the North African mountains, which in turn are key to ensuring the water supply in countries like Morocco. **We urge the Commission to make good use of the opportunity offered by the new EU Biodiversity Strategy to regulate the exotic pet trade through the adoption of an EU Positive List of species that are allowed to be traded and kept as pets.**

The adoption of an EU Positive List – as already adopted in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – would be based on a scientific risk assessment and would provide clarity to owners and enforcement agencies. The positive list system is a “deeply transformative policy”, which checks many boxes that are included in the European Green Deal: it will empower consumers to make informed and sustainable choices; it is based on reliable, comparable and verifiable information; and it provides a preventive mechanism with the “do no harm” principle at its very core. Additionally, an EU-wide Positive List has a great potential for the simplification of legislation or its implementation. Lastly, it will create room for significant financial savings in the long run, an important consideration in light of the major investments the implementation of the European Green Deal will require in the present fragile economic context.

The persisting trade, both legal and illegal, of endangered species, including tigers and elephants, is particularly detrimental and should be a key component of a global approach to protect biodiversity in the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030. EU efforts to fight the illegal ivory trade within and from the EU and to **adopt a total ban on EU ivory trade to, from, and within the EU** must be urgently stepped up.

⁴ <https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/12745/eu-seizures-report-2020-final-web.pdf>

Endangered species such as tigers are still bred for commercial purposes, traded throughout the EU and exported out of the EU, infringing adopted CITES decisions. Legal trade can easily pose as a cover for illegal trade and contributes to the increasing demand for products made from endangered species. **The Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 should incorporate stricter measures on intra-EU and external trade in endangered species, like tigers and tiger products.**

The EU should encourage national governments in Europe and worldwide to **promptly and permanently close wildlife markets**. These include live animal markets and “bush meat” markets (markets selling meat from wildlife species that are hunted in tropical forests) in EU Member States. These markets are detrimental to wildlife conservation and the welfare of the animals, and have shown to be a potential source of infectious diseases.

Finally, Member States should acknowledge the importance of environmental crime by **putting sufficiently deterrent fines in place**.

Strengthening the protection of European Wildlife

The IPBES global assessment stresses the need for strengthening environmental laws and improving their implementation as a key lever for protection of biodiversity. The EU has a strong existing legal framework in place for the protection of its wildlife: the Birds and Habitats Directives. The implementation of these pan-European nature conservation instruments brought several species back from the brink of extinction in certain areas of Europe, allowing for their slow recovery.

However, in highly populated continents like Europe, coexistence with wildlife can cause conflicts with human socio-economic interests. Consequently, European wildlife is still killed and persecuted, contravening EU law and jurisprudence. In recent years in particular there have been increasing calls in some Member States to allow more flexibility in using derogations to the EU Habitats Directive and lethally manage large carnivore populations. However, top predators such as wolves and bears are key components of the European terrestrial ecosystems. Their populations and reproduction are regulated by environmental factors like the abundance of prey, and their presence is crucial for wider terrestrial biodiversity.

The European Commission’s ‘Fitness Check’ of the Birds and Habitats Directives concluded that *“evidence indicates that the Annexes in their current form provide an adequate level of protection to enable the objectives of the Directives to be met”*⁵. In the follow-up ‘Action Plan for nature, people and the economy’, the European Commission committed to *“further support stakeholder platforms/fora to promote dialogue, including at biogeographical level and within the framework of international Conventions and Agreements, to exchange experience, knowledge and co-operate in addressing conflicts between people and protected species (e.g. large carnivores, Cormorants, geese) (2017-2019)”*⁶.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 should include clear commitment of the European Commission and Member States to:

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/index_en.htm

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/action_plan/index_en.htm

- Invest in **the development of new and innovative tools to prevent conflict with large carnivores and other wildlife species and increase tolerance and social acceptability**, also in specific contexts which are associated with major challenges;
- Ensure continued EU financial support to Member States to allow **granting full compensation to farmers for damages caused by protected animals and to fully reimburse costs of investments made to prevent such damages**;
- Secure the coordinated engagement of EU Member States' environmental, agricultural and fisheries authorities **to support positive management measures to ensure that populations of protected species are maintained at, or restored to, a Favourable Conservation Status throughout their natural range within the EU**;
- **Promptly and efficiently persecute illegal killing of wildlife**; EU Member States should cease to endorse infringement of the EU Nature legislation.
- **Ensure EU policy coherence with other sectors**, which was generally lacking in the previous EU Biodiversity Strategy.

Management of pathways of introduction of invasive alien species

While the new EU regulation 1143/2014 on invasive alien species (IAS) has been adopted according to the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy, the management of pathways of introduction of IAS to prevent new invasive species from disrupting European biodiversity is far from being achieved. In addition, the effectiveness of the IAS Regulation has been undermined by the strong pressure of Member States and the industry, which have successfully opposed the listing of species like the American mink, despite this having a very high impact on biodiversity.

The exotic pet trade has been recognized to be one of the main ways in which IAS are introduced by the Bern Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), but few efforts have been undertaken so far to adopt effective solutions. Attempts by the pet trade to self-regulate have comprehensively failed. Efforts to educate the public on exotic animal husbandry have also met with little success.

Based on ever-changing trends, new species regularly appear in the European pet trade; therefore, Negative Lists – which ban the keeping of some species of animals – do not fulfil the precautionary approach and need regular updates that require extensive resources, and entail a considerable time lag due to bureaucratic burden, as demonstrated by the slow process to update the List of Species of Union Concern. In contrast, a Positive List of allowed species – as mentioned above – is based on a scientific risk assessment that provides clarity to owners and enforcement agencies and creates less regulatory bureaucracy and costs.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, **the new Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 should include specific actions to regulate the exotic pet trade in the EU and consider the benefits offered by the adoption and implementation of an EU Positive List for allowed pet species.**

Provide adequate financial support to biodiversity conservation

The implementation of an ambitious and successful Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, including the development of new legislation and the better implementation and enforcement of the existing one, will require a **substantial increase of the EU budget for biodiversity conservation**. It will be necessary to ensure good coordination, coherence and consistency between all available EU policies and funding instruments, with a view to **avoiding public subsidies or investments that are or may be harmful to biodiversity**.

In particular, important actors in the fight against wildlife trafficking should be financially supported. For instance, rescue centres and sanctuaries in Europe play a critical role in ensuring the welfare of confiscated live animals and supporting enforcement efforts. The important role played by rescue facilities in the fight against the illegal wildlife trade and exploitation has been highlighted in the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking. However, providing housing for rescued animals is a constant challenge for authorities and rescue centres alike, as there are simply not enough spaces for all the animals that need them⁷. While there is considerable variation between EU Member States in how wild animal rescue facilities are supported, they all suffer from a chronic lack of funding which underlies many of the problems faced by wildlife rescue facilities. While it is the responsibility of Member States to ensure proper funding and support for enforcement efforts and care for seized and confiscated wildlife, there is also clear justification for **funds to be allocated at the EU level and made available to Member States to ensure consistent and appropriate support is provided to wildlife rescue facilities across Europe**.

Evidence base and data collection

We recommend the following relevant documents:

- EU trade policy and the wildlife trade
([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578025/EXPO_STU\(2016\)578025_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578025/EXPO_STU(2016)578025_EN.pdf))
- Exotic pet trade: analysis of the problems and identification of solutions:
<https://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/sites/eurogroup/files/2020-03/Exotic%20pet%20trade%20report%20EG%20general%20version%20final.pdf>
- Breaking Point: Solving the European Wildlife Rescue Crisis:
https://www.aap.nl/uploads/inline-files/Solving%20the%20European%20Wildlife%20Rescue%20Crisis_web.pdf
- An overview of seizures of CITES-listed wildlife in the European Union:
<https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/12745/eu-seizures-report-2020-final-web.pdf>

⁷ https://www.aap.nl/uploads/inline-files/Solving%20the%20European%20Wildlife%20Rescue%20Crisis_web.pdf

- Large Carnivore Management Plans of Protection: Best Practices in EU Member States:
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2018\)596844](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2018)596844)
- COVID-19 is teaching us a harsh lesson: We need to change our relationship with animals:
<https://www.eureporter.co/economy/eu-economy/2020/04/03/covid-19-is-teaching-us-a-harsh-lesson-we-need-to-change-our-relationship-with-animals/>