



Society for Conservation Biology
Europe Section

Press release of 12th September 2022

Policy Committee of the Society for Conservation Biology – Europe Section

Do not sacrifice biodiversity to swiftly address war and energy crises - scientists warn against worse crises to come

Crises, such as the war inflicted by Russia and Belarus on Ukraine, are not only devastating for society, but also for the environment. It is the newest in an unlimited series of crises of human wellbeing, including economy, finances, food provisioning, health, energy, climate, and biodiversity. Harmful exploitation of our environment as a quick problem-solving during such emergency situations will inevitably provoke new humanitarian crises, scientists warn.

Conservation professionals therefore urge societies to not sacrifice biodiversity for immediate problem-solving. They alert that biodiversity and its effective conservation and restoration play an essential role in peace-making and peace-keeping. In view of imminent ill-informed decision-making during this global crisis, conservationists strongly advise European societies and policy-makers to prioritise four actions:

Stop using forests as an energy source

Keep hands off forests as an energy source for increased harvests of fuel wood inside the EU, meant as a replacement of missing imported fossil fuels from Russia and Belarus. Instead, the old-growth forests remaining in Europe must be protected without further delay, and wood harvest levels should be considerably decreased. Forests combat climate change, provide water resources and clean the air, and we need them as protective shields against temperature increases and droughts. Forests are not renewable.

The expansion of renewable energy must not be made at the expense of nature

Abstain from opportunistically ‘switching off’ and bypassing well-established environmental checks in infrastructure planning, such as cutting through unfragmented natural areas for wind power installations. Only with scrupulous environmental impact assessments can we avoid the trap of affording wellbeing at nature’s cost. Environmental law should be closely followed, now more than ever.



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No border walls: they do not stop people, but dissect nature

Redirect investments in the construction of border fences and walls towards the support of ecosystem conservation in the source regions of human migration. Border fences are proliferating in Europe without any environmental impact assessment, nor compensation or mitigation measures. Data clearly show that they do not hold back humans, but dramatically disrupt animal populations and impact natural ecosystems.

Make food production environmentally friendly

Keep on track towards environmentally sound food production and halting human food waste. Intensification of agriculture through increased use of fertilisers and pesticides, drainage of natural wetlands or cultivating on marginal, unproductive land will lead to only tiny increases in food production, but will instead have large and long-lasting detrimental impacts on the natural foundations of human wellbeing, including climate protection.

On a positive note, it is crucial to recognise that protecting healthy ecosystems is an important contribution to peace-keeping. An intact natural environment allows humans to enjoy wellbeing where they are, without the necessity to compete for natural resources or being forced to migrate to other regions. Likewise, it is stressed that biodiversity conservation provides us with tested tools for peace-making: Transboundary protected areas invite for cross-border collaboration, and peace parks in several parts of the world have successfully pacified violently disputed border regions.

Background information:

From 22nd to 26th of August, around 700 conservation professionals from 45 countries gathered in Prague for the 6th European Congress for Conservation Biology (ECCB 2022). During four days of symposia, invited plenary talks, workshops and discussion panels, participants reviewed subjects pertinent to conservation science, ranging from biological to societal and political topics. The relationship between biodiversity conservation and peace, as explained above, was discussed during a panel with representatives of conservation biology, sociology and political decision-making from Ukraine, Poland, and beyond. Another important outcome was the adoption of the “Prague Manifesto for Biodiversity Conservation – ECCB 2022” that expresses fundamental concerns about the dire state of European biodiversity, and the urgent need to act for its effective conservation through adopting science-based solutions by decision-makers.



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6th European Congress for Conservation Biology:

<https://www.eccb2022.eu/>

Prague Manifesto for Biodiversity Conservation – ECCB 2022:

<https://conbio.org/groups/sections/europe/eccb-prague-2022-manifesto/>

Contact:

Dr. Nuria Selva: nuriselva@gmail.com, +48-600135676, +34-662093769

Dr. Stefan Kreft: stefan_kreft@gmx.de, +49-176 81477133

Dr. Laura Bosco: laura.bosco@helsinki.fi, +358-45 2785058