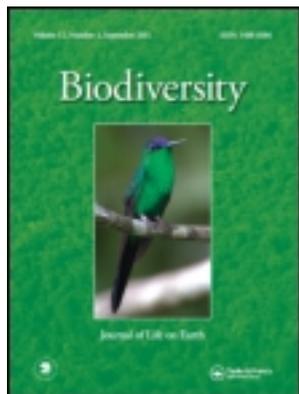


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Publisher: Taylor & Francis

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## Biodiversity

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tbid20>

### The UN Decade for Biodiversity 2011-2020

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Version of record first published: 16 Nov 2011.

To cite this article: Stephen Aitken (2011): The UN Decade for Biodiversity 2011-2020, *Biodiversity*, 12:3, 143-143

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14888386.2011.629802>

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## EDITORS CORNER

### The UN Decade for Biodiversity 2011–2020

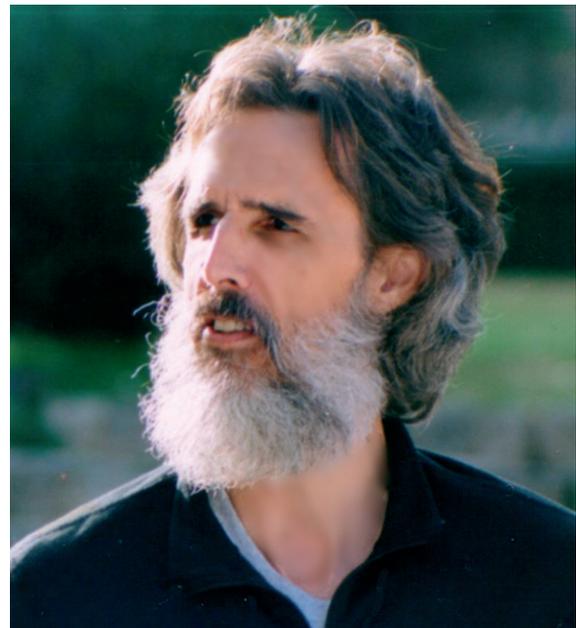
Last year at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 10) in Nagoya, Japan, the 193 signatory countries created a strategic plan for the next decade. Known as the *Aichi Targets*, measurable goals were set to address the failed *2010 Biodiversity Targets* and the ongoing loss of global biodiversity. A recommendation was made to the UN General Assembly who then declared 2011–2020 the UN Decade for Biodiversity. The strategic goals include, amongst others, preventing the extinction of endangered species, halving the loss of forests and natural habitats, sustainable fishing, halting ocean fertilisation, saving coral reefs, reducing pollution, increasing protected terrestrial and inland water areas from 12 to 17% and increasing protection for marine and coastal areas from 1 to 10%. Also included is a provision requiring governments to reclaim 15% of degraded lands, in an attempt to get nations to expand from conservation into restoration.

In this issue, a study from India, *Coal mining impact on vegetation of the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve in the Meghalaya State of India*, emphasises the need for documenting baseline data on environmental impacts before restoration programmes can even be initiated. A study from Nigeria, *Environmental sensitivity mapping of the coastal areas in the south-western zone of Nigeria*, collected both ecological and socio-economic data in order to map environmental sensitivity to oil spills and other impacts. Both of these papers are studies of ecosystems rarely documented. Clearly, singer/songwriter Joni Mitchell's famous line 'you don't know what you've got till it's gone' does *not* apply to biodiversity. A more appropriate dictum might be 'if you don't know what you've got, how are you going to know when it's gone?' There is, by recent estimates, about 8.7 million species on our planet ( $\pm 1.3$  million) but only about 20% have been recorded. The rate of expansion of *The Red List of Threatened Species* is testament to the fragile nature of Earth's biodiversity and to the fact that we had better get a move on protection before what 'we don't know we've got' is gone!

Planet Earth is made up of highly specialised species, some of which are capable of surviving only in the niches to which they are adapted. The study of a

*Mollusc community from a rocky intertidal zone in Acapulco, Mexico* clearly demonstrates this specificity. The Blossoming Treasures section looks at the Castor Bean, one of mankind's oldest cultivated plants. Though one of the most poisonous plants in the world – toxic enough to draw the attention of world terrorists – the Castor Bean is also one of the world's most useful plants, its chemical components being used in over a thousand industrial applications and a variety of other products. It may also be the beneficial crop that some countries need to make their agriculture sustainable.

It's time we took our biodiversity targets seriously. Climate change, habitat loss, environmental degradation and land-use changes are all adding to the pressure on our planet's living organisms. Before we have a runaway list of 'species on the edge of survival' we need to act. After all it *is* the UN Decade for Biodiversity!



  
Stephen Aitken  
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