

International Year of Biodiversity

Biodiversity means that there are many different species of animals and plants in the environment. Unfortunately, modern life has reduced biodiversity in many ways. For instance, population growth, farming and forestry have destroyed the habitats of species all over the world. Moreover, new plants and animals have been introduced into areas where they have a big advantage over local species. Therefore, these introduced species can spread quickly and many local species can become extinct.

Plants are a major source of important medicines. However, there is a real danger that many plants will become extinct before we have even studied them. There are economic costs too – introduced species cause billions of dollars' worth of damage every year to the global economy. Conversely, if biodiversity is protected, it contributes hugely to our economy and quality of life. More generally, a loss of biodiversity means that nature becomes weaker and less able to cope with the stress of climate change. In other words, our lives could depend on protecting biodiversity.

Governments can provide leadership, educating the public about the values of biodiversity and the risks of its loss. Businesses can also contribute, by reducing the negative impact of their activities and work together with local communities, who often have valuable knowledge of their environment. However, it is not only big organisations that affect biodiversity. Every day each one of us has to decide what to do, what to buy and what to use. Therefore, we are all in a position to make a difference.

In order to celebrate the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010, the United Nations has collected examples of good practice from around the world. For instance, in Mongolia, an American scientist has worked together with local people to protect the world's largest mountain sheep, the argali. And in Brazil, management of fishing on the Amazon, in partnership with local people, has saved one of the world's largest freshwater fish, the arapaima, from extinction. Meanwhile, in Australia, the Trees for Life organisation now has over 10,000 volunteers who plant a million trees every year, including hundreds of different species. Although, for too long, people have been the biggest cause of biodiversity loss, projects like these show that, by working together, it is a problem that we can solve.

1 Which paragraph of the text (1–4) answers each of these questions?

- 1 What can we do to protect biodiversity? _____
- 2 How has biodiversity been reduced? _____
- 3 What examples are there of successful biodiversity projects? _____
- 4 Why is biodiversity important? _____

2 Read the article again and complete these sentences below with the correct word from the list.

Governments	Damage	Biodiversity	Projects
Population	We	Human	The United Nations

- 1 _____ growth is one cause of the destruction of habitats.
- 2 _____ can be caused by the introduction of species.
- 3 _____ makes a huge contribution to economies.
- 4 _____ life may depend on the protection of biodiversity.
- 5 _____ can provide education about biodiversity.
- 6 _____ all make decisions every day which affect biodiversity.
- 7 _____ has put together a collection of good practice in biodiversity.
- 8 _____ around the world are part of the solution to biodiversity loss.

3 Many verbs in English can form nouns ending *-ion*. Find the verbs in the article that form these nouns, which were used in exercise 2.

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 destruction _____ | 5 education _____ |
| 2 introduction _____ | 6 decision _____ |
| 3 contribution _____ | 7 collection _____ |
| 4 protection _____ | 8 solution _____ |

4 Find linking words and phrases in the article that mean the same as these.

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 For example _____ | 5 On the other hand _____ |
| 2 What's more _____ | 6 That is to say _____ |
| 3 As a result _____ | 7 At the same time _____ |
| 4 But _____ | 8 Even though _____ |

5 Use your own ideas to complete these sentences about biodiversity.

- 1 Biodiversity is important for our economies and science. Moreover, ...

- 2 Businesses can do a lot to protect biodiversity. For instance, ...

- 3 Although there have been successful biodiversity projects, ...

- 4 Biodiversity cannot be protected at a national level. Therefore, ...

6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- Which areas of your country are especially rich in biodiversity?
- Are any introduced species causing problems in your country?
- What are people in your country doing to protect its biodiversity?
- Have you done anything in 2010 that has made a difference to biodiversity?

Glossary

- forestry** (*noun*) - the production of wood and other products from trees
habitat (*noun*) - the place an animal or plant lives
species (*noun*) - a particular type of plant or animal
extinct (*adjective*) - When a plant or animal becomes extinct, it means every example has died
source (*noun*) - where something comes from
contribute (*verb*) - do something positive
cope with (*phrasal verb*) - deal successfully with a difficult situation
partnership (*noun*) - an agreement to work together, as equals
volunteer (*noun*) - someone who works for a good cause without receiving any money
solve (*verb*) - find the answer to a problem