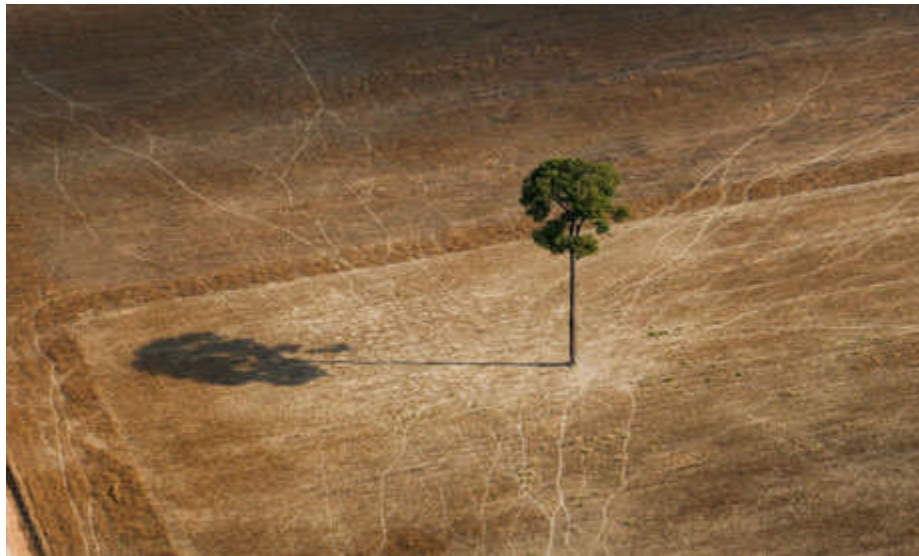


## UN says case for saving species 'more powerful than climate change'



The Brazilian Nut Tree "Castanheira" is protected in Brasil, but plenty had been logged.  
Photograph: Daniel Beltra/Greenpeace

The economic case for global action to stop the destruction of the natural world is even more powerful than the argument for tackling climate change, a major report for the [United Nations](#) will declare this summer.

[The Stern report on climate change](#), which was prepared for the UK Treasury and published in 2007, famously claimed that the cost of limiting climate change would be around 1%-2% of annual global wealth, but the longer-term economic benefits would be 5-20 times that figure.

The UN's [biodiversity](#) report – dubbed the Stern for Nature – is expected to say that the value of saving "natural goods and services", such as pollination, medicines, fertile soils, clean air and water, will be even higher – between 10 and 100 times the cost of saving the habitats and species which provide them.

To mark the [UN's International Day for Biological Diversity](#) tomorrow, hundreds of British companies, charities and other organisations have backed an open letter from the Natural History Museum's director Michael Dixon warning that "the diversity of life, so crucial to our security, health, wealth and wellbeing is being eroded".

The UN report's authors go further with their warning on biodiversity, by saying if the goods and services provided by the natural world are not valued and factored into the global economic system, the environment will become more fragile and less resilient to shocks, risking human lives, livelihoods and the global economy.

"We need a sea-change in human thinking and attitudes towards nature: not as something to be vanquished, conquered, but rather something to be cherished and lived within," said the report's author, the economist Pavan Sukhdev.

The changes will involve a wholesale revolution in the way humans do business, consume, and think about their lives, Sukhdev, told The Guardian. He referred to the damage currently being inflicted on the natural world as "a landscape of market failures".

The report will advocate massive changes to the way the global economy is run so that it factors in the value of the natural world. In future, it says, communities should be paid for conserving nature rather than using it; companies given stricter limits on what they can take from the environment and fined or taxed more to limit over-exploitation; subsidies worth more than US\$1tn (£696.5bn) a year for industries like agriculture, fisheries, energy and transport reformed; and businesses and national governments asked to publish accounts for their use of natural and human capital alongside their financial results.

And the potential economic benefits are huge. Setting up and running a comprehensive network of protected areas would cost \$45bn a year globally, according to one estimate, but the benefits of preserving the species richness within these zones would be worth \$4-5tn a year.

The report follows a series of recent studies showing that the world is in the grip of a mass extinction event as pollution, climate change, development and hunting destroys habitats of all types, from rainforests and wetlands to coastal mangroves and open heathland. However, only two of the world's 100 biggest companies believe reducing biodiversity is a strategic threat to their business, according to another report released tomorrow by PricewaterhouseCoopers, which is advising the team compiling the UN report.

"Sometimes people describe Earth's economy as a spaceship economy because we are basically isolated, we do have limits to how much we can extract, and why and where," said Sukhdev, who visited the UK WHEN as a guest of science research and education charity, the [Earthwatch Institute](#).

The TEEB report shows that on average one third of Earth's habitats have been damaged by humans – but the problem ranges from zero percent of ice, rock and polar lands to 85% of seas and oceans and more than 70% of Mediterranean shrubland. It also warns that in spite of growing awareness of the dangers, destruction of nature will "still continue on a large scale". The International Union for the [Conservation](#) of Nature has previously estimated that species are becoming extinct at a rate 1,000 and 10,000 times higher than it would naturally be without humans.