

'Year of the Tiger' Angelo Caserta - BirdLife's European Regional Director

Everybody knows that 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity. Probably less people know (at least in Europe!) that, according to the Chinese Zodiac, this is also the Year of the Tiger. According to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the tiger is endangered, with a decreasing population. It is already extinct in most of Asia, and is on the brink of extinction in China. If we do not act, the wild tiger will disappear one day, together with many other species that are simultaneously under threat because of human activities. Will the next years of the tiger still be a time for celebration rather than a time for mourning? At BirdLife, we believe so. This is why we engage, with millions of members and supporters worldwide, to make it happen. Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems are not just an option among others. They are a necessity for a sustainable future. They provide us with the five elements, which in several philosophies are thought to be essential materials of all existent aggregates and phenomena: earth, water, air, fire, aether. Earth and fertile soils are the basis for food production, man-made or wild. Water is so important for life, that, as far as we know, water IS life. Air is the delicate balance of gases of planet Earth that, combined with food and water, makes living species live. Fire, is the energy provided by nature, under the form of fossil fuels, a fantastic gift of prehistoric biodiversity, or biomass or renewables. Earth, Water, Air, Fire, remind us of an impressive list of services provided by biodiversity and ecosystems. Losing biodiversity means losing these services, and that means also economic loss. A study into The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), supported by the European Commission and German Government, has shown that by 2050, if biodiversity loss continues unchecked, the costs would amount to about 7% of global GDP. But without healthy ecosystems and without biodiversity, our economy would collapse on the long term. Just think at what happened to Rapa Nui, covered by forests, its inhabitants overexploited its natural resources to a point that the island ecosystem collapsed, meaning death for many and the end of a once advanced civilisation. The earth is a small island in the vast universe? Haven't we learned the lesson? Can we afford to lose the tiger and the many thousands of vulnerable, endangered and critically endangered species? Biodiversity has also a spiritual value, represented by the fifth element, Aether. We are intelligent creatures, meant to elevate ourselves not only by satisfying our primary needs, but also by fulfilling our spiritual needs. We need beauty around us to be happy. Biodiversity is a source of beauty and happiness. The bond between humanity and biodiversity, which is reflected in the art, religions and traditions of Europe, will be lost if we continue to destroy its basis - nature itself. Biodiversity IS on the brink, as we said loudly during our exhibition in the European Parliament on 26 January, but we can still act, we can still change the trend. At BirdLife we know that we are

not alone. We will do it together with our members and supporters and millions of concerned citizens in Europe. We will do it together with other civil society organisations. We will do it together with forward-looking businesses, farmers, hunters, land owners. We will do it together with the EU Institutions and with other European governments, where an increasing number of decision-makers and high officials are aware and engaged to stop the loss of and restore European biodiversity and natural Heritage. By addressing the biodiversity crisis, we will also address the climate change crisis. As President Barroso said in a recent letter: "Climate and the status of biodiversity are irrevocably intertwined. Healthy ecosystems – to which the Natura 2000 network is a major contribution – play a critical role in resisting environmental stresses such as climate change". After the failure of the Copenhagen talks, the year of Biodiversity and the October Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, offer reasons for hope. Europe, and the world, cannot afford a second failure. Let's work together, doubling efforts, funding and creativity, to make 2010 a memorable year for nature. This blog post is from BirdLife's European Newsletter. To register for the letter, please [click here](#).