BirdLife?s History in Objects, #10: A Drink For Nature

Title
In 2002, world leaders met to discuss the grandiose topic of the future of nature on earth. Through the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), 150 governments set targets to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. They were not met. There were some local successes, but not only was wildlife loss not significantly reduced, the overall rate was not reduced at all.1 Was this due to a lack of commitment? A lack of appreciation of their importance? A lack of funding?

In 2010, new targets were set. Two years have already passed, and the negotiations on financing these ?Aichi Targets? have not been resolved due to patchy information on the investment required, and the associated deference in political will. With less than eight years until the target deadlines, the lack of concrete information is hampering progress. However, this time BirdLife International is determined to ensure world leaders take the targets seriously.

Solid science

An international team of authors led by scientists from BirdLife and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) has produced the first authoritative information on the financial costs of meeting two of the most urgent Aichi Targets: saving threatened species and protecting key sites for conservation. With over a year of research led by Donal McCarthy (Global Environmental Economist, BirdLife / RSPB), data from contributors all over the globe helped elucidate these important figures. Published today in the journal *Science*, the paper uses birds to estimate the costs for all nature. Having been the world expert on birds since 1922, BirdLife?s complete datasets allow such an extrapolation.

The hard facts

Up to **US$5 billion** is what is required annually to reduce the extinction risk for all known globally threatened species; with **US$76 billion** needed each year to protect and effectively manage a network of terrestrial sites of global conservation significance. With only 12% of this money currently being met for birds, overall funding to meet both Aichi Targets will need to increase by at least an order of magnitude. But on a global scale, the costs are trivial. McCarthy adds: ?More prosaically, the total required is less than 20% of annual global consumer spending on soft drinks, or about the same as the annual total expenditure on pets in the US.? Saving all the worlds globally threatened birds would cost less than $1 per person from the world?s richest countries- that?s cheaper than every person buying one drink once a year.

A price on nature?

The total costs are very small relative to the likely costs of inaction. The targets set by the CBD recognise the reduction of biodiversity loss as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth. ?The total sums may sound large, but these are investments, not bills ? saving nature makes economic sense because of the payback in terms of services and benefits that people receive in return, from mitigating climate change to pollinating crops?, said Dr Stuart Butchart, BirdLife International?s Global Research Coordinator. For example, the pollination services bees alone provide are estimated to be worth $8 billion a year.

It is difficult, and sometimes controversial, to assign financial value to natural wonders. However for governments

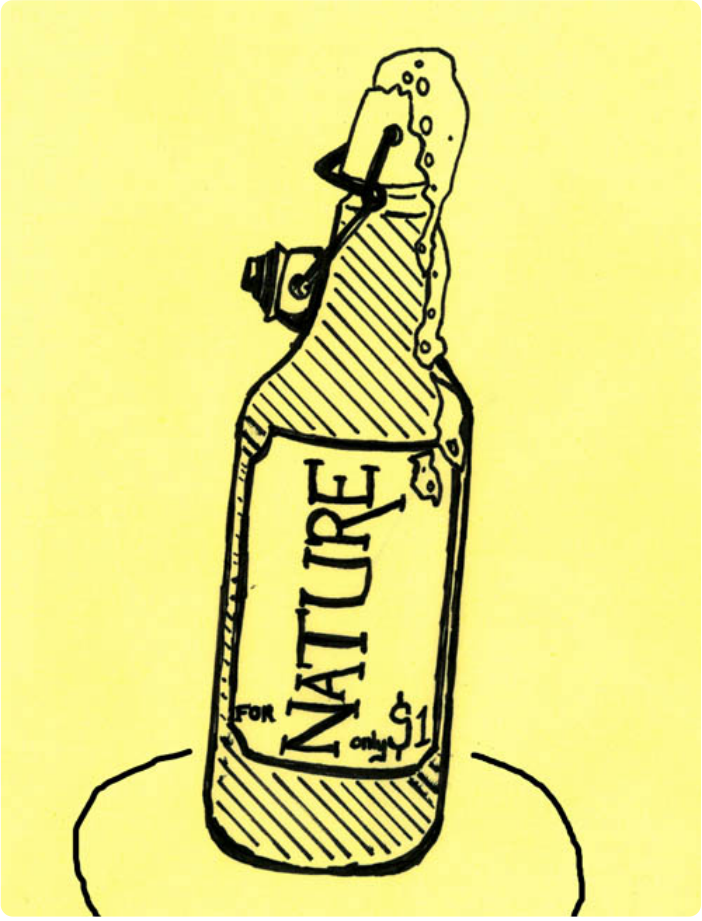
and businesses ? who make decisions based on hard, tangible data ? producing such evidence can be highly influential.

At the eleventh hour

And with the 11th CBD Conference Of Parties currently underway in India, the planned publication could not have been timed better. Combined with pressure from BirdLife policy delegates in attendance, the outcomes from this paper will hopefully lead to positive policy action by international decision-makers.

McCarthy et al. (2012) Financial Costs of Meeting Two Global Biodiversity Conservation Targets: Current Spending and Unmet Needs. *Science*.

BirdLife International has published countless scientific studies, undertakes important policy work, and has been working for nature and people for decades. This article is part of a series celebrating BirdLife's 90th anniversary.



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