

Now or never: action to stop impending extinctions is announced

Title

Developing countries will be in a better position to halt the extinction of species that are hanging by a very thin thread, under a new partnership sponsored by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Presented at the Convention on Biological Diversity's 10th Conference of the parties (CBD COP 10), the GEF proposes that a new platform be created to help developing country parties to the CBD scale up their investments in threatened species protection, adding a new line of defense for highly threatened biodiversity worldwide. The GEF, the World Bank and BirdLife International will respond to the call of developing countries for assistance in their efforts to protect sites identified by the Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE). Over the next four years, the global map of key sites for extinction avoidance produced by the alliance will be used as an important blueprint for targeted action, helping to safeguard key sites where species are in imminent danger of disappearing. Destruction of wild nature is reducing the habitat of countless species. For many, suitable habitat is down to a bare minimum. The Alliance for Zero Extinction has identified the epicenters of imminent extinction ? sites that are the last and only remaining refuge for severely threatened species, classified as Critically Endangered or Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Earlier this week at CBD COP10, AZE released an updated analysis and map (at www.zeroextinction.org) for 920 globally highly threatened species that are confined to some 587 single sites spread across the globe. Loss of any of these sites, to habitat degradation or other threats, would precipitate final extinction events, at least in the wild.



From left to right: Warren Evans, Director of Environment, World Bank; Marco Lambertini, BirdLife; Gustavo Fonseca, Head of the Global Environment Facility's Natural Resources Team; Bráulio Dias, Brazil's Ministry of the Environment; Mike Parr, ABC and AZE Chair

The GEF, the financial mechanism of the CBD, has been guided by the Conference of the Parties to provide funding to developing countries to ensure that the protection of globally threatened species is not missed within their national protected areas systems, said Monique Barbut, CEO and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility. The sites identified by the Alliance for Zero Extinction provide a roadmap to the locations where urgent interventions are imperative before extinction inflicts its final blow. The World Bank Group will serve as the lead implementing agency of the GEF, with BirdLife International providing technical assistance to countries, working with local partners and others in the AZE alliance. Conserving these sites is a clearly identifiable and actionable global biodiversity conservation priority, in the context of the international community's ambition of meeting the post-2010 targets currently under discussion in Nagoya. Several countries are pioneering AZE site conservation, including Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Philippines, among others. While much has already been achieved through the AZE approach, work now needs to be greatly scaled up to meet the challenge. The World Bank looks forward to getting access to the highly endangered sites from the Alliance for Zero Extinction to assist in its own operations. This scientifically based and critical information has not always been readily available to development agencies such as the World Bank and others. AZE would pilot the use of this tool to mainstream biodiversity in other World Bank sectors, said Warren Evans, Director of the Environment Department of the World Bank. The work of the Alliance for Zero Extinction focuses attention on the most urgent priorities for species conservation through the conservation of their last refuges, said Dr Marco Lambertini, Chief Executive of BirdLife International. Conserving these sites will not only prevent extinctions but benefit many other threatened species, and secure vital ecosystem services for local people. This new partnership will help to translate AZE information into effective, on-ground conservation. We look forward to working closely with others in the AZE Alliance, as well as the GEF and World Bank, to help countries around the world make zero extinction a reality. At least for vertebrate species, extinctions have not yet accelerated as rapidly as many had feared, so we still have a window, though a relatively short one, to build a comprehensive global strategy to halt the impending extinction crisis, said Mike Parr, Chair of the AZE Steering Committee. The starting point for that action should be a global plan that provides a realistic means of halting this crisis: the AZE approach provides the centerpiece of this plan. And Brett Jenks, President and CEO of RARE added: We applaud GEF's leadership in helping developing nations protect what the world cannot afford to lose the last populations of hundreds of ecologically-important species facing imminent extinction. If we work at the global level to find replicable solutions and empower local communities to adopt them at AZE sites worldwide, we just might achieve one of conservation's most inspiring victories to date. BirdLife has played a key role in the development of the concepts underlying AZEs, though its pioneering approach to the development of globally consistent criteria based on threat and irreplaceability to identify priority sites for biodiversity conservation. For example, the Chapada do Araripe in Brazil is listed as an AZE site because of the presence of the Critically Endangered Araripe Manakin *Antilophia bokermanni*. BirdLife's [Preventing Extinctions Programme](#) is an

innovative and effective approach to supporting and expanding the implementation of action on the ground at AZE sites ? particularly those for Critically Endangered species ? through the appointment of Species Guardians (individuals, local or national organisations who implement action for target species) supported by Species Champions (who provide the necessary resources). BirdLife Species Guardians have been appointed and are being supported to implement urgent actions for 26 Critically Endangered AZE species, while an additional 11 Critically Endangered species are also receiving action through the Programme. *The Alliance for Zero Extinction (AZE) is a network of biodiversity conservation organizations whose aim is to prevent extinctions by identifying and safeguarding key sites where species are in imminent danger of disappearing. Today the AZE network comprises of 68 Civil Society Biodiversity Conservation Groups in 19 countries representing the concerns of millions of citizens. The American Bird Conservancy chairs AZE's secretariat. For more information visit: www.zeroextinction.org* Image credit: Araripe Manakin Project