

Biodiversity and climate COPs

 Check for updates

Restoring the connection between people and the rest of nature hinges on whole-system science, actions and negotiations.

Those who think about and practise sustainability are constantly looking for holistic interpretations of the world and are trying to understand systemic relations, networks and connections. Biodiversity has all of these things. It shows how every species needs other species to exist and thrive. It shows that all living organisms are part of a sophisticated and fascinating system made up of myriads of links. And humans are undoubtedly a part of it.

In the realm of sustainability, experts also ponder about time: how can life exist and thrive over time? Indeed, the above mentioned fascinating system evolves over time. And, over time, it has to adapt to unexpected change. It does that well when it is healthy, and less well when it is ill and constantly disturbed.

For a long time, man-made impacts kept accumulating almost completely unchecked by societies, until the consequences for human well-being became untenable. Nowadays, environmental crises make the headlines regularly. They are nothing but the result of a broken connection between people and the rest of nature.

Climate change is one major outcome of the broken human–rest of nature connection and has wide ramifications for both people and the planet. We now face imminent disaster, unequally across the world, yet addressing climate change remains an incredibly thorny task. Country representatives from most nations around the world meet regularly at the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – most recently at COP27, which was held in Egypt – to continue the debate on what actions are needed to move the climate agenda forward, all while disasters continue to hit the most vulnerable populations. The world has seen 27 COP meetings to the UNFCCC so far; one wonders how many more meetings will be needed to see real change happen.

Interestingly, country representatives also meet regularly to discuss biodiversity protection; biodiversity decline – the other major



consequence of the broken human–rest of nature connection – is just as worrying, with severe and ramified implications that are still largely underappreciated by decision-makers. These gatherings are the COP meetings to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Last year, we wrote about the then forthcoming COP15 to the CBD (*Nat. Sustain.* **4**, 189; 2021), the meeting in which the new conservation targets to be met by 2030 were to be agreed. We highlighted the extent to which experts worried that those new targets might not go far enough. The meeting was postponed more than once due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is finally happening on 7 December 2022, in Montreal, Canada. The world has already seen 15 COP meetings to the CBD, how many more meetings will be needed for the biodiversity crisis to be averted?

But let's go back to thinking about sustainability. Experts look for holistic visions of the world. Here is an interesting example of what holism means. Biodiversity decline and climate change are both the result of the broken connection between people and the rest of nature, they ultimately have the same, deep roots. They are mutually reinforcing phenomena: unhealthy biodiversity contributes to climate change, and climate change makes biodiversity ill. All this is bad news for human and planetary well-being.

The climate–biodiversity conundrum, at least to some degree, has been recognized at a higher level – during COP27, leaders dedicated one day to [biodiversity](#).

Yet, given that these issues are highly interconnected and have the same origin, why is the world insisting on discussing them as separate agendas? Why are we still holding two separate COPs? How are these meetings going to promote any fruitful synergy? How will they lead people to reconnect with the rest of nature? Country representatives should be breaking silos, embracing holism and bringing these intertwined issues, and their multiple ramifications, to the same negotiating table.

Nature Sustainability welcomes the long-awaited COP15 to the CBD and hopes that countries will agree on feasible yet ambitious 2030 targets to protect and enhance biodiversity. But most of all, we hope that all of the experts and leaders involved in addressing the environmental crises embrace holism to promote meaningful actions across the world aimed at restoring people's connection with the rest of nature. We are eager to see progress to this end. In the meantime, the [collection](#) we started in March 2021 with *Nature Ecology & Evolution* has been updated to renew our support to the biodiversity community.

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