

TUNZA *answers your questions*

1. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CONSERVE BIODIVERSITY?

We depend on biodiversity – the fruits of billions of years of evolution – for the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink. Our agriculture and forests depend on it. Animals and plants would not survive without diverse ecosystems to meet their needs. Biodiversity is the basis of all living things and forms the web of life that sustains us all.

It also includes genetic differences within each species – for example, between varieties of crops and breeds of livestock – essential to protect food supplies from pests and diseases.

Another aspect is the variety of ecosystems, such as those that occur in deserts, forests, wetlands, mountains, lakes, rivers and agricultural landscapes. In each ecosystem, living creatures, including humans, form a community, interacting with one another and with the air, water and soil around them.

2. WHAT THREAT DOES CLIMATE CHANGE POSE TO BIODIVERSITY?

Climate change (or global warming) brings temperature increases, sea-level rises, changes in rainfall patterns and increasingly frequent extreme weather events like storms, droughts and floods – all of which affect biodiversity. Natural changes in the global climate over the last 1.8 million years resulted in major shifts in the ranges of species and marked reorganization of biological communities, landscapes and biomes. But these occurred in a landscape far less fragmented than today's, and without pressure from human activities. Now climate change caused by people is combining with other human pressures to stress biodiversity far beyond the levels of the recent evolutionary past.

3. DOES BIODIVERSITY CONTRIBUTE TO DEVELOPMENT?

Biodiversity provides many goods and services that sustain our lives. Nature tourism, pharmaceutical plants and the production of goods from agricultural and forest ecosystems – all of which can contribute to countries' development – depend on it. The Convention on Biological Diversity promotes the sustainable use

of biodiversity, maintaining its potential to meet human needs and aspirations both now and in the future.

4. ARE THE WORLD'S MOST BIOLOGICALLY DIVERSE AREAS THE MOST PROTECTED?

No. Most of the biodiversity we seek to conserve lies outside protected areas, so we must work hard to engage everyone in using the world's resources sustainably. We could never completely preserve all the world's biologically diverse areas because many millions of people live in and depend on them for their livelihoods.

5. IS THERE ANY WAY OF PRESERVING BIODIVERSITY ARTIFICIALLY?

Preserving species outside their natural habitats – *ex situ* conservation – takes place in botanical gardens, zoos, aquaria and gene banks. These provide a temporary safe haven, but this is probably not the most desirable way to preserve biodiversity, except in extreme cases.

6. HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE BIODIVERSITY AT HOME?

There are many ways to do this:

- Use your biodegradable waste as compost in the garden.
- Keep at least part of your garden wild to encourage a variety of local plants, insects and small animals.
- Do not use chemicals in the home or garden; instead use natural fertilizers and natural ways of managing pests.
- Do not use chemicals for cleaning in your home. Use eco-friendly cleaners that do not pollute waterways or poison wildlife.
- Buy organic food.
- Reduce, reuse, recycle – minimize waste and resource use.

B I O D I V E R S I T Y

Q&A

Do you have any QUESTIONS on environmental issues that you would like the experts at **UNEP** to answer?

Please send them to unepub@unep.org, and we will try to answer them in future issues.