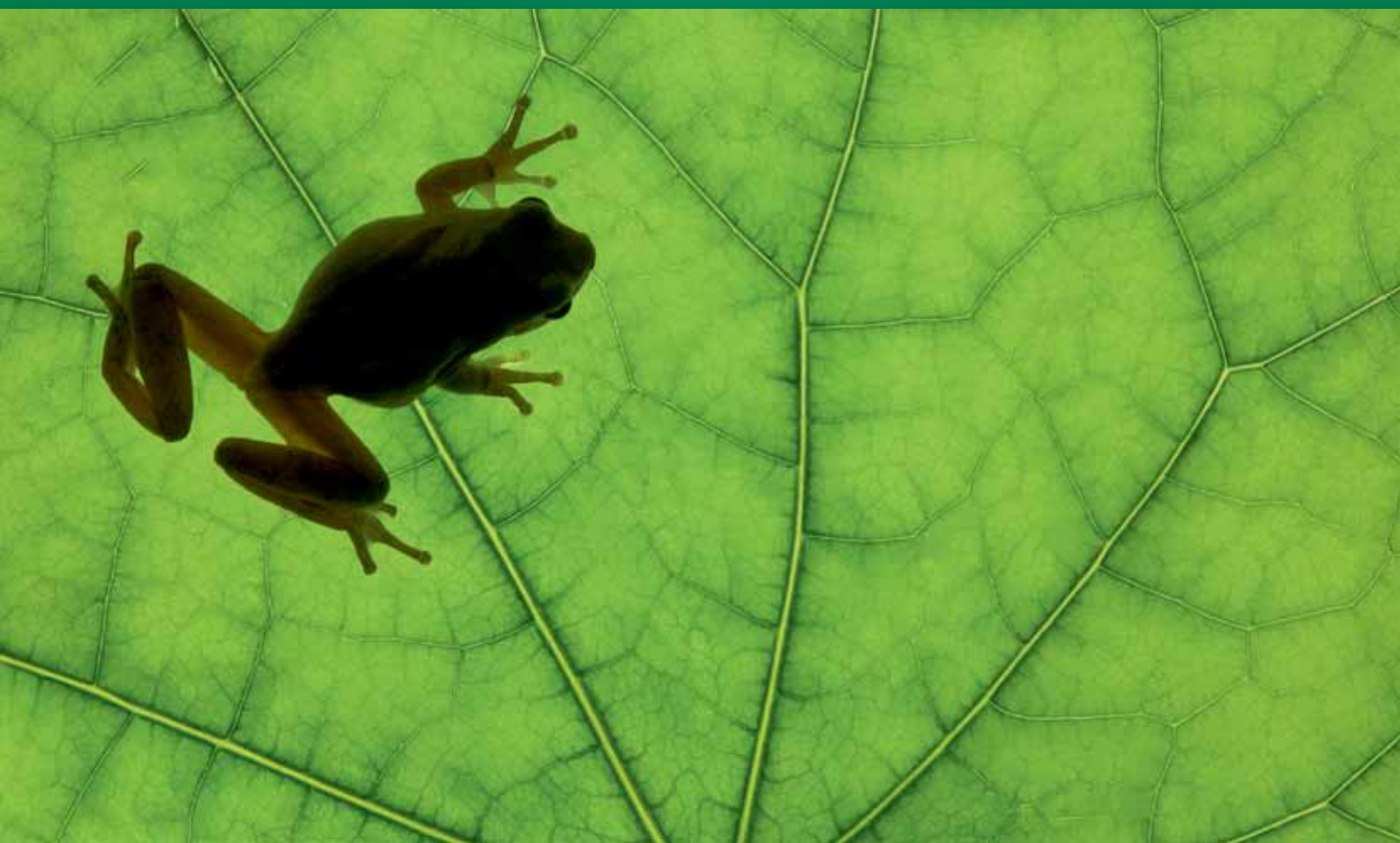


ITTO Tropical Forest

UPDATE

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Biodiversity is life

The world's ecosystems provide environmental services we simply cannot live without. As an integral part of nature, our fate is tightly linked with biological diversity, i.e. the huge variety of animals, plants and microorganisms that live in mountains, forests, oceans, wetlands and other ecosystems. We rely on this diversity of life to provide us with essentials such as water, food, fuel and medicine. Yet each day an estimated 150 species disappear, many due to human activities. The rate of loss is as much as 1000 times higher than the pre-human, or background, extinction rate.

Forests are particularly rich in biodiversity. They harbor an estimated two-thirds of all terrestrial species, as well as a fascinating array of ecological processes. Tropical forests, in particular, are among the most biologically diverse ecosystems on earth. To raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity, and the threats that are causing its rapid decline, the UN General Assembly declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB). During the year, people are celebrating

***Inside ▶ CBD's forest agenda...
REDD+ and biodiversity... Forest resilience...***



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... Editorial continued

the diversity of life on the planet, and its contribution to human well-being, while working to take steps needed to combat its loss.

The IYB 2010 boasts more than 500 events worldwide. Its flagship event is the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which will take place in Nagoya, Japan, from 18–29 October. COP 10, as it is called in short, will be attended by several thousand delegates representing the 193 Parties to the Convention and many observers. The delegates will adopt a new strategic plan for the Convention for 2011–2020 with the participation of all stakeholders. The new strategic plan will include clear and measurable targets to achieve the objectives of the Convention in forests and other ecosystems by 2020 (Stahl and Christophersen, p. 3).

COP 10 is also expected to adopt a protocol on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources which will benefit the world's forests through improved arrangements to equitably share the benefits from the utilization of forest genetic resources, which are the basis for numerous medicinal and other products. The protocol would also add to the growing understanding of the full economic value and potential of forest biodiversity. The report *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)*, which will be presented at COP 10, contains a wealth of data and analysis on the true value of forests. Unfortunately, few of these values are currently being remunerated at meaningful levels but this is changing. The *TEEB* report will contribute to promoting the valuation and remuneration of ecosystem services (Sukhdev, p. 8).

Biodiversity and climate change will be another central focus of the negotiations. COP 10 will consider a series of recommendations to address climate change-related challenges and opportunities for forest biodiversity and local livelihoods. Among other recommendations, COP 10 may invite Parties to implement the protection of primary forests and sustainable forest management in production forests (Sayer and Boedhihartono, p. 11). COP 10 may also invite Parties to take into account biodiversity and ecosystem services when designing, implementing and monitoring

afforestation, reforestation and forest restoration activities for climate change mitigation. In addition, COP 10 will discuss the risks and benefits from Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+), and other sustainable land management activities, for mitigation, biodiversity, and forest-dwelling indigenous and local communities (Harvey and Dickson, p. 13).

Finally, COP 10 will discuss the role of the Convention in monitoring forest biodiversity. Although significant advances were made in recent years, reporting and monitoring of forest biodiversity still suffers from high costs and uncertainties, and problems of data compatibility. For this reason, the CBD relies on the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), and its joint 'Task Force on Streamlining Forest-related Reporting,' to further improve forest biodiversity reporting and monitoring. In this context, COP 10 may also request improved definitions of forest and forest types, with a view to further improving the biodiversity monitoring component of the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment.

Biodiversity underpins the long-term stability of ecosystem goods and services derived from forests. The permanence of these goods and services rests on forest resilience, i.e. a forest's ability to withstand and recover from disturbance. Forest resilience, in turn, rests on biodiversity at multiple scales (Thompson, p. 16; Nasi *et al.* p. 19). Maintaining and restoring forest biodiversity promotes forest resilience to human-induced pressures, such as climate change or invasive alien species (see Jackson and Howard, p. 22). Conserving and sustainably using forest biodiversity, and maintaining forest resilience, is therefore a crucial 'insurance policy' to make sure forest ecosystems continue to provide us with the essentials on which we all depend.

As the slogan of the International Year of Biodiversity reminds us: Biodiversity is life... biodiversity is OUR life.

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