

# THE BIODIVERSITY



*Lesser frigatebird (Fregata ariel). Aldabra Atoll, Indian Ocean.*



*One third of amphibians species are threatened with extinction. Suriname.*

**A** neologism that appeared during the 1980s, the term “biodiversity” became established at the 1992 Earth Summit. It denotes biological diversity, that is to say all living species, their genetic variability, and the diversity of the ecosystems that they form, i. e. of the ties that bind them together in their natural habitats. Now, we are facing a severe crisis in biodiversity, linked to the development of the way we live. The rate, causes, and consequences of this phenomenon remain the subject of debate.



*North atlantic right whale (Eubalaena glacialis). Valdès peninsula, Argentina.*

Since the signing of the Convention on Biodiversity in 1993, and its ratification by 168 countries, the world has been committed to significantly reducing the reduction in biodiversity – but has had very limited success.

Along with water, energy, health, and agriculture, biodiversity was one of the five pillars of sustainable development recognised by the United Nations in the runup to its Johannesburg summit in 2002. But it is difficult to assess its value, and knowledge in this field is in its infancy. It is estimated that only about 10% of living species are known – that is, 2 million species described out of 10 to 30 million in existence.

One thing is certain, however: our existence is

inextricably linked to the diversity of living species, which provide many ecological services from which we benefit: food, medicines, textiles, building materials, and so forth).



*(Greta otto) Costa Rica.*



*Bengal tiger (Panthera tigris).  
Bandhavgarh national park. India.*



*Sharp-snouted rock lizard  
(Lacerta oxycephala). Croatia.*



*Gentoo penguin (Pygoscelis papua). Antarctic.*

#### **DESPERATELY LENGTHENING LIST**

How can we save biodiversity without making an inventory of it? This is one of the titanic missions of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an organisation founded in 1948 and based in Geneva, which issues a Red List of threatened species every year. Drawn up with the help of scientific experts, it is the authoritative world source on the status of plants and animals. At present, almost 20,000 animal and plant species facing extinction are on the Red List. To mention just a few, 50% of turtles, a third of amphibians, and a quarter of mammals are threatened with extinction.

The IUCN plans to further mobilise governments which, according to the organisation, are increasingly aware that it is in our interests to protect biodiversity.

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