

Conservation News

World comes together in first-ever World Species Congress

Beginning at 10.00 on 15 May in Aotearoa (New Zealand), and spanning 24 hours, over 10,000 conservation experts and practitioners from 203 countries and territories met to commit to the acceleration of species recovery during the first-ever World Species Congress, hosted by Reverse the Red. At the World Conservation Congress in 2008, IUCN members adopted Resolution 4.019 calling for a World Species Congress: a science-based, interdisciplinary, inclusive gathering to highlight the status of species and chart the course of species conservation.

National and regional conversations took place across 96 satellite events, engaging an estimated 100,000 people and facilitating rich connections, deep conversations and a broad reach. The relationship between a global event and local and regional convenings meant that national networks supporting governments in updating and implementing their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans were able to connect and coalesce around the Congress.

With 200 speakers representing 68 countries in 165 sessions, the programme of the Congress shared messages of urgency, success and hope. Notable speakers included Jane Goodall, Russell A. Mittermeier, Jon Paul Rodríguez, Grethel Aguilar, David Cooper, Ivonne Higuero and Amy Fraenkel, as well as representatives from the governments of Angola, Ireland, India, Colombia, Peru, New Zealand, Australia, Spain, Kenya, Germany and Brazil. These speakers shared stories of species recovery across their spheres of influence, to galvanize further support and action to reverse species declines.

Pivotal actions from the Congress are the more than 3,750 pledges made since the Reverse the Red Species Pledge launched. To achieve Global Biodiversity Framework targets, we need coordinated, strategic efforts from all partners. The pledge is a first step in understanding which organizations are committing their skills, experience and knowledge to the recovery of species. Pledges made during the World Species Congress include: Twycross Zoo to reverse declines of 15 threatened species by 2030; Bristol Zoological Society to reverse declines of 97 species; at the satellite event hosted by Te Nukua Wellington Zoo, 30 conservation organizations to protect 50 species from decline; Botanic Gardens Conservation International to assess 2,000 tree species; and the IUCN Species Survival Commission's Antelope Specialist Group to assess 95 species.

The urgency to achieve global biodiversity targets is increasing. But the World Species Congress was a reminder that saving species is possible. The attendees came away with insights, tools, strategies and frameworks to accelerate their efforts, and connections to more than 10,000 other conservation experts dedicated to the same goal (see Engagement Report available at reversethered.org/world-species-congress-2024). The first-ever World Species Congress was a pivotal moment in conservation: an attestation that, together, we can save species.

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