**Global biodiversity: indicators of recent declines**

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In 2002, world leaders finally woke up to the fact that humans were trashing the planet, and we would all suffer as a consequence. They adopted an ambitious goal to do something about it, collectively committing to significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Over the following years, various actions were implemented, and indicators developed and improved to help measure progress. Ben became heavily involved in ‘rebooting’ WWF’s Living Planet Index, making this a much more robust indicator of the abundance of vertebrates around the world.

When 2010 arrived, there was obviously considerable interest in whether we had succeeded in meeting the ‘2010 biodiversity target’, as it had become known. I was on secondment to the UN’s Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre at the time, and agreed to take on the task of trying to assess this. We gathered together a wide range of indicators, from Ben’s ‘LPI’, to metrics of water quality, coral reef health, forest cover and trends in extinction risk, among others. We assessed each of these individually to see how the trends had changed, but I wondered if we could analyse them in an aggregated form. Ben had explored various approaches, and settled on one, for analysing lots of time-series of population trend data for the LPI and determining if there were points in time when there were significant changes in the aggregated trends. I remember a series of emails and phone calls with Ben to discuss whether we might be able to treat the diverse set of indicators in the same way, in order to determine if indeed there had been a significant reduction in the rate of loss of biodiversity. I sent him the data, and with customary efficiency and astuteness, he produced a figure showing overall trends in the indicators for the state of nature, the pressures upon it and the solutions and responses being implemented to tackle biodiversity loss. These graphs elegantly demonstrated that biodiversity was continuing to decline – with no significant slow-down, owing to growing pressures despite increases in policy responses and interventions on the ground like. It was our ‘killer figure’, and the paper got accepted in the journal Science.

The paper generated a fair bit of media coverage, and formed the core science included in the intergovernmental ‘Global Biodiversity Outlook’ report. No one challenged the finding that we had failed to meet the 2010 biodiversity target, and it stimulated governments to develop a much more sophisticated global ‘strategic plan on biodiversity’ for 2011-2020, with far more detailed goals and targets. Our paper went on to become the most highly cited of any of Ben’s publications, having been referenced by over 2,800 other publications to date – testament to the combination of addressing a question of great societal significance, developing some robust analyses and applying these to a substantial and novel dataset. I am sure that it wouldn’t have had such impact without Ben’s intellectual inputs and efforts to make it as robust as possible. It is a great example of his legacy to conservation science.

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