

Scientists' warning: Biodiversity in Europe continues to decline

2018-04-17 Leuphana professor participates in study by the World Biodiversity Council

Medellin/Lüneburg. At its meeting in Medellin (Colombia), the World Biodiversity Council (IPBES) presented its studies on biodiversity and ecosystem services in various regions of the world. They show that the increasing intensity of conventional agriculture and forestry is leading to a decline in biodiversity. Findings concerning Europe and Central Asia indicate that the appropriation of nature for human needs, such as the production of food and energy, goes at the expense of important ecosystem functions, such as pollination or soil formation. One of the main authors for this region is the sustainability expert Prof. Berta Martín-López from Leuphana University of Lüneburg.

“Unsustainable food consumption in Central and Western Europe makes these regions dependent on food and fodder imports corresponding to the annual harvest of 35 million hectares of arable land, an area the size of Germany,” says Prof. Berta Martín-López.

The authors of the study are convinced that future economic growth can only be sustainable if it does not lead to a further deterioration of biological diversity. However, up until now, there are no guarantees that this can be achieved, as this would require far-reaching political changes and tax reforms at global and national level.

In Europe and Central Asia, traditional land use systems are increasingly being abandoned, which results in a loss of regional knowledge and practices. Production-based subsidies, which drive growth in agriculture, forestry and raw material extraction, also exacerbate the problems associated with land use. Economically viable concepts for the conservation of traditional land use and lifestyles are scarce.

Scientists consider a short-term decrease on the pressure on biological diversity unlikely to happen. A scenario analysis for the coming decades shows that, if the current trend continues, it will rather hinder the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals will only be reached by applying balance in transferring nature's yields to humanity and regard for a number of values.

The authors see a range of opportunities for governments and companies to protect biodiversity while ensuring nature's contribution to human well-being. They highlight particularly integrated approaches, for which national well-being is more than a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

You will find the studies on the individual regions here.

Datum: 2018-04-17

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