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Madagascar News Release – 2014 Living Planet Report

Solutions still in reach as world biodiversity suffers major decline

Antananarivo, Madagascar – Global wildlife populations have declined by more than half in just 40 years as measured in the World Wide Fund for Nature’s (WWF) *Living Planet Report 2014*.

The report also shows that 1.5 Earths are needed to meet the demands humanity is currently placing on the planet. Each year we dig deeper into the planet’s reserve of natural resources and use more than nature can replace.

WWF International Director General Marco Lambertini says the report’s findings show immediate action is needed to reverse current trends.

“Biodiversity is a crucial part of the systems that sustain life on Earth – and the barometer of what we are doing to this planet, our only home. We urgently need bold global action in all sectors of society to build a more sustainable future,” says Lambertini.

Critical wildlife declines

According to the report, populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles have declined by 52 per cent since 1970. Freshwater species have suffered a 76 per cent decline, an average loss almost double that of land and marine species.

Biodiversity declines in Africa highlight the intense pressure felt by tropical species. For the thousands of species tracked by the report, the tropics showed a 56 per cent loss across populations compared to 36 per cent in temperate zones. The biggest recorded global threats to biodiversity are habitat loss and degradation, fishing and hunting, and climate change.

“Madagascar is one of the key locations in the fight to preserve species and bio-diversity,” says Anitry Ny Aina Ratsifandrihamanana, WWF Madagascar Country Director. “The primary causes of the decline in vertebrate species – habitat loss and degradation, and exploitation through hunting and fishing – are some of the main environmental problems facing Madagascar.”

Unequal demands, unequal consequences

Low-income countries have the smallest footprint, but suffer the greatest ecosystem losses. Most high-income countries have maintained footprints greater than the amount of bio-capacity available on the planet for over fifty years. While people in middle and low-income countries have seen little increase in

their relatively small per capita footprints, low-income countries show dramatic declines in biodiversity (58%), middle-income countries also show losses (18%), and high-income countries show an increase (10%). The report notes that high-income countries may be outsourcing biodiversity loss and its impacts to lower-income countries through the importation of resources.

The path to sustainable development

No country is achieving both a high level of human development and a globally sustainable footprint, but some are moving in the right direction.

“That’s the real challenge for Madagascar,” says Ratsifandrihamanana. “Right now, Madagascar is well below the world average bio-capacity, but as the country develops smart choices will need to be made to keep our impact low.”

For a country to achieve globally sustainable development, it must have a per capita Ecological Footprint smaller than the per capita biocapacity available on the planet, while maintaining a decent standard of living as defined by global measures.

With world population expected to exceed 9.5 billion by 2050, understanding the implications on food, water and energy security is essential. In research cited by the report, half of all future population growth is expected to occur in just eight countries, six of those countries are in Africa.

Opportunities for positive change

Continuing decline in biodiversity and worsening of ecological overshoot are the result of decisions that do not adequately account for the needs of our natural world. The same indicators that show where we have gone wrong can point us to a better path. Changing our course and finding alternative pathways will not be easy, but can be done. At the Rio+20 conference in 2012, the world’s governments affirmed their commitment to an “economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations.” This is what we need to aim for.

“Nature is both a lifeline for survival and a springboard to prosperity. Importantly, we are all in this together. We all need food, fresh water and clean air – wherever in the world we live. At a time when so many people still live in poverty, it is essential to work together to create solutions that work for everyone,” said Lambertini.

The *Living Planet Report 2014* provides a framework called the ‘One Planet Perspective’ that charts a course towards a sustainable future. The ‘One Planet Perspective’ shows that the trends identified in the report can be reversed by producing better and consuming more wisely, diverting investment away from the causes of environmental problems and toward the solutions, making fair, far-sighted and ecologically informed choices about how to manage shared resources and by preserving, restoring important ecosystems and habitats.

The complete report, summary and support material can be found at www.wwf.mg.

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About WWF

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with over 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the Earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. www.panda.org/news for latest news and media resources.