

# Interview – Enrique Lahmann

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## **How would you define biodiversity?**

Biodiversity is a word that was coined in the 80s and that means, for those of us working in the field, something essential but perhaps rather misunderstood by much of the public at large. And yet it is crucial that we comprehend biodiversity because we are an integral part of it. Biodiversity means all species – birds, plants, animals, large and small – with which we share this world. Governments are now aware of the importance of species, of ecosystems and of the diversity within them. And we all now better understand that one is not more important than the other, but that it is the sum of all interactions that play a key role in creating a world worth living in.

## **How is climate change affecting biodiversity?**

It's obvious that the climate changes currently affecting us all are having a direct impact on the biological diversity of this planet. Some species can only survive within a narrow range of temperatures. Coral is a good example. We know that coral needs tropical and subtropical waters to survive. This represents a fairly narrow temperature bracket that, if stretched even a little bit, will result in the destruction of a delicately balanced ecosystem.

## **What are the priorities for conserving biodiversity?**

It's above all important to understand and to hold dear all that biodiversity represents, and that is what the IUCN, either directly through its activities or indirectly through its member organizations, has long been striving to do. Once understood, we must then grasp the factors that have an impact on biodiversity, such as climate change, the introduction of invasive alien species, over-fishing, etc. We have to get to the point where we completely understand how each and every person is responsible for conserving biodiversity and how, acting as a group, we can make significant changes in its favour. I don't think it's useful to lay all responsibility on governments or any other single entity. We will be able to take action to conserve biodiversity only to the extent to which we understand that ants, for example, are key to a forest's survival and key to recycling nutrients for all other life forms.

## **What has changed in people's perception of biodiversity in the last 20 years?**

You can see the glass as half empty or half full. On one hand there is a far greater awareness of the imperatives involved in conserving biodiversity among the general public. But on the other we are still on the first step of a long journey.

## **How will history look back on our attitude toward biodiversity in 500 years?**

It is my deepest wish that a person looking back on us 500 years from now will be able to say, "These people, who inhabited planet earth at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, had the vision and the courage to take the necessary measures to pass on a world in which we can now live decently."