

# Interview – Enrique Lahmann

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## **What role does the private sector play in safeguarding biodiversity?**

The private sector clearly has a crucial role to play, both in the negative and positive impacts they can have, and also in the actions they can take to help protect biodiversity. Large parts of the private sector base their activities, and therefore profits, on resources linked directly to biodiversity. This is the case for the pharmaceutical and tourism industries, for fisheries, for forestry – all of these depend directly on healthy ecosystems. So responsible action on the part of the private sector can make a significant contribution to the proper management of biodiversity.

## **What is new in the fight to safeguard biodiversity?**

The Rio summit in 1992 caused a leap in public awareness on biodiversity and its importance in our daily lives. There have been frustrations, and certainly many targets set then still have not been met. That said, I think people at large are now much more conscious of the role they can play in helping protect biodiversity by modifying their behaviours and also by putting pressure on their governments to take the necessary corrective actions to stem the destruction of biodiversity.

## **How has the IUCN's role in protecting biodiversity evolved over the last ten years?**

I think it's important to look at what the IUCN has accomplished since its inception 60 years ago, and not just in the last ten years. It began as quite an odd union because it involved both governmental and non-governmental bodies. And through its decades of existence it has proved that conservation requires the cooperation of all sectors – governmental, civil society, private, academic, and indigenous – to create an alliance capable of accomplishing significant changes in our manner of interacting with nature.

## **What effects might bio-fuels have on biodiversity?**

The debate on biofuels is still open. We can identify points in favour and against them, and I don't think it is possible to say for sure whether they are overall positive or negative for society and the environment. It all depends on where they come from and to what extent their production impacts ecosystems. Biofuels could well be part of the solution to our energy problems and they could also help us mitigate climate change, but we must, nonetheless, be very careful about their means of production.

## **How would you link the current food crisis to biodiversity loss?**

I think the food crisis we're currently facing has many causes. Some say that agriculture for biofuel production is driving up the prices of food crops. Some say the roots of this problem are to be found more in climate change and the extreme impacts it is having on agriculture. These factors are obviously both adversely affecting food production. Biodiversity could be part of the solution if we manage it well and if we get to a point where ecosystems can function normally. These provide essential resources, such as air and water, but also food. That's why the IUCN is calling upon governments, organisations and the private sector to be very careful in how they approach ecosystem management.