

The Arctic Biodiversity Assessment released at Arctic Council Ministerial

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The Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), the biodiversity working group of the Arctic Council has released the "Arctic Biodiversity Assessment (ABA)," a report containing the best available science informed by traditional ecological knowledge on the status and trends of Arctic biodiversity and accompanying policy recommendations for biodiversity conservation.

"The Arctic Biodiversity Assessment is a tremendous achievement," says Gustaf Lind, chair of the Senior Arctic Officials of the Arctic Council. "The recommendations will help shape Arctic conservation in the years to come and will prove itself an invaluable tool to the Arctic Council. The ABA articulates exactly how the environment is changing and signals to policymakers what needs to be done to secure the ecosystems and species that people rely on for life and livelihood. This is the information we need right now to help us achieve a sustainable future."

"Governments recognize the important work being carried out by CAFF for biodiversity monitoring and assessment and this report is another vital assessment tool for all of us who work to protect biodiversity," said Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary for the Convention on Biological Diversity.

"The assessment, which explores the potentially dramatic consequences of climate change and other factors that adversely affect species and their habitats in the Arctic, will provide critical information to policy makers on what is needed to secure the ecosystems and species that local communities rely on for their livelihoods. In essence, the report gives us a preview of what may happen in other parts of the world if we do not get serious about achieving the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and its 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets."

Arctic biodiversity is being degraded, but decisive action taken now can help sustain the vast, relatively undisturbed ecosystems of tundra, mountains, fresh water and seas and the valuable services they provide, says the report. This globally unique opportunity for proactive action can minimize or prevent problems that would be costly or impossible to reverse in the future.

"As climate belts move north, large parts of the Arctic may lose their specific Arctic ecosystems and biodiversity," says Hans Meltofte, chief scientist for the ABA. "The Arctic is home to thousands of unique cold-adapted species, many of which are found only there. But with climate change and increased interest in the region, if we do not act now we may lose the incredible assets and fascination that Arctic biodiversity offers us all."

The key findings of the ABA deal with the:

- significance of climate change as the most serious underlying driver of overall change in biodiversity;
- necessity of taking an ecosystem-based approach to management; and
- importance of mainstreaming biodiversity by making it integral to other policy fields, for example, in development, plans and operations.

Services and values to people

The Arctic is home to over 21,000 species, including many globally significant populations of unique and highly cold-adapted mammals, birds, fish, invertebrates, plants, fungi and microorganisms, some found nowhere else on Earth. In addition to its intrinsic worth, Arctic biodiversity provides innumerable services and values to people. More than a tenth of the world's fish catches by weight come from Arctic and sub-Arctic seas. The Arctic is the breeding ground for millions of migratory birds that fly to every continent, connecting the region with the rest of the world and contributing to global biodiversity.

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Media material:

Photos for press use, story outlines, backgrounders and more resources:

www.arcticbiodiversity.is

Background

The ABA, involving over 250 scientists has been produced by some of the world's leading experts and has been presented to the Foreign Ministers of the Arctic Council countries at the Arctic Council Ministerial on May 15. The ABA synthesizes scientific findings on status and trends in Arctic biodiversity. This major circumpolar effort provides a much needed description of the state of biodiversity in the Arctic. The ABA:

- creates a baseline for use in global and regional assessments of Arctic biodiversity which will inform and guide future Arctic Council work;
- provides up-to-date knowledge gathered from scientific publications supplemented with insights from traditional knowledge holders;
- identifies gaps in the data record;
- describes key mechanisms driving change; and
- presents science-based suggestions for action on addressing major pressures on Arctic biodiversity.

Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna

CAFF is the biodiversity working group of the Arctic Council and consists of National Representatives assigned by each of the eight Arctic Council Member States, representatives of Indigenous Peoples' organizations that are Permanent Participants to the Council, and Arctic Council observer countries and organizations. CAFF's mandate is to address the conservation of Arctic biodiversity, and to communicate its findings to the governments and residents of the Arctic, helping to promote practices which ensure the sustainability of the Arctic's living resources. For more information: www.caff.is

Arctic Council

The Arctic Council is a high level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic. Arctic Council Member States are Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States of America. In addition to the Member States, the Arctic Council has the category of Permanent Participants who include the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC), Aleut International Association (AIA), Gwich'in Council International (GCI), Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and the Saami Council (SC). On May 15, 2013 Canada took over the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council from Sweden. For more information: www.arctic-council.org

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