

**Message from Khaled El-Enany, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion
of the International Day for Biological Diversity**

22 May 2026

On this 2026 International Day for Biological Diversity, UNESCO celebrates a simple but powerful idea: protecting life on Earth begins locally.

Across the world, communities are already showing the way. In the Dja Biosphere Reserve in Cameroon, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are helping restore forest ecosystems. In Colombia's Seaflower Biosphere Reserve, mangroves are protected by combining scientific research with local knowledge. These examples remind us that biodiversity is sustained every day by people who know their lands, waters and living environments best.

This is also the central message of UNESCO's new report, *People and Nature in UNESCO-Designated Sites: Global and Local Contributions*, the first assessment of our designated sites as a single global network.

The findings are striking. Across 2,273 UNESCO-designated sites — Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage sites and Global Geoparks — monitored wildlife populations have remained stable on average, while global monitored wildlife populations have declined sharply. These sites cover 13 million km², host over 60% of the world's mapped animal species, and are home to nearly 900 million people.

Their strength lies in the governance of their ecological richness. Many are living landscapes shaped by local communities, Indigenous Peoples, languages, knowledge systems and forms of stewardship passed down through generations.

This is what "acting locally for global impact" to quote this year theme means in practice. At UNESCO, we will continue to support this local action through science, education, culture and knowledge-sharing. This also guides our cooperation with the Convention on Biological Diversity to advance biodiversity education, so that young people can understand, protect and help shape the environments on which their future depends.

Because biodiversity protection begins locally, but its impact reaches far beyond borders and generations.