

# Time at last for biodiversity



**The delayed UN Biodiversity COP15 follows closely on the heels of the Climate COP27. We look at what comparisons can valuably be made between the two summits.**

It is finally happening. After a quarter of a decade of delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the COP15 UN biodiversity summit will open in Montreal on 7 December. The location has moved (although China is still the host), and much has changed since we [first wrote](#) in anticipation of the meeting in January 2020. Since then, we have revisited the topic [several times](#), noting in particular the central importance of finance and the need to coordinate climate and biodiversity policy agendas. The recent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) values [assessment](#) has started to diversify approaches to valuing nature, and there have been relevant shifts in the political landscape. Amongst these, one of the most recent and important is the election again of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as President of Brazil, defeating the incumbent right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro. This result has been [widely welcomed](#) in scientific and environmental circles, and there is genuine hope of a turning point in how the globally important biodiversity of Brazil is managed. At time of writing, there is [preliminary news](#) coming out of the simultaneous climate COP27 and G20 meetings of an agreement between Brazil, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (who between them account for more

than half the world's tropical forests) to work together on forest conservation.

As with COP27, finance remains the biggest sticking point for COP15, and the one that will need resolving at the highest level. The detailed goals, targets and indicators that have been worked out by scientists and policy makers over the past several years will only make a difference if they are financed adequately and fairly. Issues of rich countries compensating poorer ones, which have beset climate talks, apply similarly to biodiversity. Bold moves to provide the money, especially while the world veers between pandemic and recession, will require political leadership. Unlike COP27, however, which has seen active participation from many world leaders, there are no plans for any national leaders to attend COP15. Although there might be some advantage to being able to negotiate away from the political limelight, on balance, the air time that biodiversity would get on the global agenda if leaders attended is probably more valuable. World leaders should therefore be confronted about their absence, as happened for [some leaders](#) at COP27, and should be challenged to provide evidence of their commitment to biodiversity. It will be a sad indictment of priorities if leaders are seen attending the men's football World Cup in Qatar, which is the subject of much controversy, while COP15 is in progress. And the world's media should also be scrutinizing the summit, keeping up a daily feed that maintains momentum, and exposing any undue pressures from vested influences, as they have done at COP27 (for example, for [fossil fuel lobbying](#)).

It is also important that politicians and journalists explain any suggested financial settlements in the full context of existing global economics and wider environmental policy. There is already a complex ecosystem of international aid and grants, targeting health, development and the environment. There are also plenty of within- and between-country examples of grants and subsidies for environmental protection, many of which are tied up with food production. All of these transactions carry an element of both short-term and long-term self-interest, and any new payments that arise from COP27 or COP15 should not be spun by critics as being dangerously unprecedented. There must be more emphasis and recognition that paying to preserve biodiversity is in the interests of all nations, and is an entirely proportionate addition to existing financial frameworks. At the same time, care must be taken to avoid perverse incentives and greenwashing, as can happen with offsetting schemes. An example of this is the [recent dispute](#) about whether carbon credits in Australia actually lead to forest regeneration that would not have happened without them.

Many in our research community will be playing an active part in Montreal, and the rest of us will be keeping a close eye. As we await the outcomes, the [collection of articles](#) that we put together with our sister journal *Nature Sustainability* for an earlier-scheduled COP15 date has been updated with more recent content.

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