



**MESSAGE OF THE SECRETARIAT OF THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY**
on the occasion of
WORLD WILDLIFE DAY
3 March 2017
“Listen to the young voices”

Wildlife is an important part of our lives. For many, it provides essential food and medicine. Ecosystem processes are driven by the combined activities of many species, and each organism has a role to play in providing us with economic, medicinal and scientific, recreational and ecological services, including cultural values.

But many species are threatened with extinction. Many more have declining populations. Habitat loss, over-exploitation, poaching and illicit trafficking are the main threats. People are the architects of our current wildlife crisis, and people must be the solution.

The theme for this year’s World Wildlife Day, “Listen to the young voices”, is about working across generations and connecting with young people on wildlife conservation and protection. It is about involving youth, as members of communities, in actions that will ensure a sustainable future for wildlife.

But urbanization and increased time spent in front of computers and on smartphones are separating young people from nature. There is a risk that these trends will undermine responsibility for wildlife conservation. At the same time, youth—with their enthusiasm and dedication to environmental issues—can often provide leadership on these issues. The future of wildlife depends on proactively engaging, educating, and connecting the next generation of conservation leaders.

Youth are an expanding demographic. By 2030, the number of youth aged between 15 and 24 is projected to grow by 7 per cent globally to nearly 1.3 billion.¹ In Africa, which has one of the highest growing youth rates in the world, the youth population is expected to increase by 42 per cent by 2030.

¹ www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/YouthPOP.pdf

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A positive step towards youth engagement was taken at the World Wildlife Conference, held last year in Johannesburg. Through a CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) resolution on Youth Engagement countries are encouraged to do more to engage youth in wildlife conservation issues, to promote internships or mentoring programmes, to work with universities, youth groups and other relevant associations and organizations, and create educated and engaged youth networks that can inform and influence conservation decisions.

Curbing overexploitation of wildlife depends on education, awareness-raising and community involvement. The urgent challenges that we all face in maintaining biodiversity worldwide requires that indigenous peoples and local communities are empowered to act at the national and local levels and that assistance from the international community can contribute to achieving this. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is working with its partners in the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW) to promote community empowerment in the sustainable management of wildlife. Work on customary sustainable use of wildlife is another important initiative undertaken by the CBD. Keeping these traditions alive across generations will require the active engagement with youth.

As members of these communities around the world, youth need to be part of the solution. The CPW encourages youth around the world to be a part of this work and to contribute in the celebration of this Day, in various ways. (#YouthVoices, #WWD2017, #DoOneThingToday). Since 2012, the [Global Youth Biodiversity Network \(GYBN\)](#) has been mobilizing youth at global, national and local levels to meet this challenge in the work of the CBD. Through its “[Youth Voices](#)”, it has helped engage hundreds of youth in CBD policy-making processes and activities related to biodiversity conservation. In 2017, the project will offer regional training workshops in biodiversity conservation policy and project management to create or enhance existing youth projects that directly contribute to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Wildlife management is a mechanism to promote biodiversity conservation, while simultaneously meeting human needs. Thus the urgent need for enhanced action to ensure the survival of wildlife in its natural habitats must be imparted from generation to generation. Engaging and empowering young people to be proactive in addressing wildlife conservation issues are a critical element to any country’s strategy to save, protect, and conserve its wildlife resource base.
