

# GLOBAL AGENDA

Dept. of External Affairs

ISSUES FOREIGN POLICY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

• VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2 •

SEP 20 1995

RETURN TO DEPARTMENTAL LIBRARY  
RETOURNER A LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE DÉPARTEMENTALE

## Preserving Biological Diversity:

# CANADA AND THE WORLD SUSTAINING THE WEB OF LIFE

**E**arth's biological diversity, which extends from microscopic organisms to plants and animals of every kind, is an interdependent web of life that includes all living beings. Preserving it means more than attending to the needs of individual species, it means conserving the wide range of genetic traits that exist, and maintaining the many habitats that are essential to life. Breaking one strand of the web can have unpredictable, and disastrous, effects on seemingly unrelated species.

Retaining Earth's biodiversity and using biological resources sustainably are huge challenges. Pressure on species, habitats and genetic types around the world is immense. And yet, the benefits of maintaining biodiversity are significant enough to demand action.

Most people appreciate the value of wild habitats and the species they shelter. We can also understand genetic diversity as a form of natural insurance although many of the tangible benefits of biodiversity to humans are unpredictable. For example, plant species have given us valuable drugs in the fight against cancer. The Purple Foxglove, a flower native to Western Europe and Morocco, is used to help treat heart disease. Others offer the potential of important food sources. Maintaining biodiversity keeps this vast storehouse open and thriving, while we find out just how rich it is.

The search for a mechanism to encourage protection of biological diversity came with preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In addition, the global community had other goals: the sustainable use of biological resources and a fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of genetic resource use. The overall goal was a binding convention covering all countries.

Negotiations were complex. Success was in doubt, until Canada's Prime Minister announced that Canada would sign the convention. He urged other developed countries to show leadership by doing the same.

The momentum from that action led to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Canada then became the

first industrialized country to ratify the Convention. Since 1992, Canada has taken many steps to meet its obligations. The most important has been the development of the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy.

The Strategy is the result of consultation with all sectors of society with a strong interest in policies that affect biodiversity. The federal, provincial and territorial governments have worked closely with conservationists and agriculture, business, labour and Aboriginal groups to chart a workable course.

The Strategy offers a vision of a "society that lives and develops as part of nature, valuing all life, taking no more than nature can replenish and leaving to future generations a nurturing and dynamic world, rich in its diversity of life." It sets out guiding principles that are a foundation for turning the strategic directions of the Strategy into actions.

One key element in the Strategy is a commitment to international co-operation. Canadians recognize that progress in achieving the goals of the Convention demands that co-operation. Canada has already taken steps to share its expertise with developing countries. It has been a key player in building the international mechanisms the Convention requires.

## IN THIS ISSUE

- Biodiversity: Canada and the World Sustaining the Web of Life ..... p. 1
- Biotechnology: Ensuring Environmentally Sound Approaches ..... 2
- The Convention on Biological Diversity: Our Living Legacy ..... 3
- Forest Biodiversity
- Ambassador Fraser's Column ..... 4
- Plant Genetic Resources - A Key to More Food
- Canada Bids for Biodiversity Secretariat ..... 5
- Facts and Stats ..... 6

