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2026 LIVING PLANET REPORT

The Science of Hope

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 and wildlife. From opening the world's first scientific zoo,
 to founding the Institute of Zoology and pioneering global
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ZSL manages the Living Planet Index in a collaborative
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2026 LIVING PLANET REPORT

The Science of Hope



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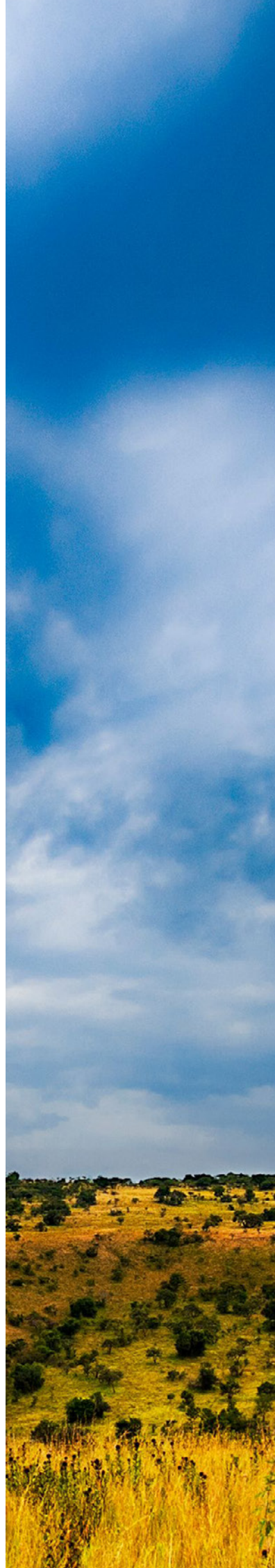
A message of hope

The opportunity before us is significant. With the right choices today, we can build a future where both people and nature thrive – but realizing that future will require transformation at a speed and scale unlike anything we have seen before.

The science in the *Living Planet Report 2026* is clear: the systems that have driven economic growth are accelerating nature loss at an unprecedented rate. Halting and reversing this trend will require transformation across entire systems – from how we produce energy and food to how we finance our economies. This transformation must be ambitious, and it must reshape global systems in a manner that is fair, equitable and inclusive.

Lasting change is never the work of one actor alone. Businesses, financial institutions, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, civil society, governments and individuals all have a role to play. When efforts align and are sustained over time, change takes hold – building on years of collective effort and strengthening momentum already underway.

This is where hope becomes a powerful driver of change. As the *Living Planet Report 2026* reveals, we have already seen hope can make possible in the recovery of species and in shifting energy systems. Now, we must carry that momentum forward and extend it further, matching our ambition to meet the scale of the challenge.



From pressure to progress

A tipping point is often pictured as a moment of sudden change. In reality, it is the result of pressures built over time, often out of sight, until a threshold is crossed.

Progress follows a similar pattern, and it rarely moves in a straight line. It takes shape gradually – through persistence, cooperation and repeated choices – until what once seemed uncertain begins to move with speed and purpose.

The pressures driving nature loss and climate change remain significant. Habitat loss and degradation, overexploitation and climate change continue to threaten species, driven by the ways we produce energy, grow food and finance our economies. Together, these forces are pushing the natural systems we depend on ever closer to their limits.

But they do not tell the full story. Alongside these pressures, a different dynamic is emerging – one that points to possibility.

The recovery of iconic species such as tigers, Atlantic and Pacific bluefin tuna, southern African elephants and green sea turtles shows what sustained, coordinated effort can achieve over time. Long-term success, however, depends on addressing the root causes of nature loss by transforming the systems that drive it.

Encouragingly, progress is already underway. Not everywhere, and not yet at the scale required, but enough to demonstrate that change is possible.

In the energy sector, a transition considered distant only a decade ago is now accelerating. Solar power has become the cheapest source of new electricity generation in most countries, and electric vehicles accounted for a quarter of global new car sales in 2024.

This shift reflects decades of policy, innovation and collaborative effort long before results were visible at scale. Extending this progress across borders, sectors and communities is exactly the kind of transformation required, so that action in one place reinforces action in another.

Change is in motion, but its course is still being written. Whether early progress develops into something more sustained will depend on the choices made now – and the pace at which they are carried forward.

We have the knowledge, the tools and the pathways. What matters now is our collective resolve to act – together.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every plant, animal, fungus and microorganism on Earth is part of a single living system, and we are part of it too.

Biodiversity, the variety of life and the ecological relationships that connect it, makes that system work. The food we grow depends on pollinators and the soil microbes that keep cropland productive. Drinking water depends on intact watersheds. Most medicines in our pharmacies originated in molecules first identified in plants, fungi or microorganisms. The climate we depend on is regulated by forests, oceans, peatlands and grasslands. And the economy itself, expressed as a number, rests on these services: about half of global GDP, roughly US\$58 trillion in 2023, comes from work that depends in some way on nature. When biodiversity is degraded, the things built on it are degraded along with it.

That degradation is now happening at a pace without precedent in human history. The Living Planet Index (LPI) measures the average change in the size of monitored populations of vertebrate species around the world: mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians. Between 1970 and 2022, the populations the LPI follows declined by an average of 73%. Other measures of biodiversity describe different parts of the same picture. The Red List Index tracks how the extinction risk of species is changing. The Biodiversity Intactness Index estimates how much of a region's original biodiversity remains compared with pre-industrial conditions. Records of documented extinctions show that species are now disappearing at rates 100 times or more above the pre-human background rate. The four indicators approach biodiversity from different angles, and they point in the same direction.

The global LPI is a global average, so it hides local details. Some regions are losing wildlife much faster than others, while some species and ecosystems are stable or recovering. About half of the populations the global LPI tracks are stable or increasing. This matters because it tells us that decline is not fixed in place. Where people have done the work, wildlife has come back.



**Where people have done the
work, wildlife has come back.**



What they had in common was a clear goal, a plan that was open to revision as lessons emerged, the agency to act, and the resilience to keep going when the work became difficult.

Conservation works, increasingly at large scales

Tigers are one of the clearest examples. In 2010, only around 3,200 wild tigers remained, and the species seemed to be sliding toward extinction. By 2025, the population had grown to roughly 5,700, an increase of more than 70%. Atlantic and Pacific bluefin tuna, which were collapsing after decades of overfishing, have recovered to the point where neither is now considered threatened. Southern African elephants are stable or growing in many of the places where local communities lead the management of the land they share with them. In 2025, the green sea turtle became the first marine turtle ever to be downlisted from Endangered to Least Concern, after 50 years of work across more than 80 nesting countries.

These recoveries took decades. They required people to keep working without knowing whether their efforts would succeed, through political setbacks, funding cuts and long stretches when nothing visible seemed to be changing. What they had in common was a clear goal, a plan that was open to revision as lessons emerged, the agency to act, and the resilience to keep going when the work became difficult. Psychologists call this combination “hope.”



Hope is a process

In conservation, hope is a process that keeps people engaged with complex, uncertain challenges over long periods. It has four components. The first is a goal grounded in something a person or community values. The second is a credible pathway to that goal, a plan that can adapt as conditions change and new information becomes available. The third is agency, the belief that the work you do can make a difference. The fourth is resilience, the capacity to keep going when progress stalls and to find new pathways when old ones close. These four components reinforce one another. When they are reinforced across groups of people, communities, sectors and borders, hope becomes collective. Collective hope is the most reliable predictor we have of whether large-scale change will occur.

The recoveries described above came from collective hope working at scale over time, rather than from luck or a few exceptional individuals.



Figure ES.1 More than a feeling, hope becomes a process to drive transformational change when goals, agency and pathways combine. Resilience provides the fortitude to move forward when barriers are encountered.



Burning coal, oil, and gas to power homes, transport, and industry generates roughly three-quarters of the greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change, which has now become a driver of biodiversity loss across every ecosystem on Earth.

The same pattern can transform the systems driving the loss

These recoveries are real, and they matter. But they sit inside a much larger set of forces driving biodiversity loss in the opposite direction, and those forces are bigger than any single species or place. Three systems are responsible for most of the damage.

The first is the way the world produces and uses energy. Burning coal, oil, and gas to power homes, transport, and industry generates roughly three-quarters of the greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change, which has now become a driver of biodiversity loss across every ecosystem on Earth.

The second is the way the world produces and consumes food. Agriculture is the single largest cause of habitat loss and degradation, the leading driver of biodiversity decline, a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, and a growing contributor to the rise of diet-related disease. The planet has already crossed seven of the nine planetary boundaries that scientists use to define safe operating conditions for the Earth system, and the food system is responsible for most of that pressure. The system also fails the people it is meant to feed: more than 673 million people are undernourished, and more than a billion are obese.

The third is the financial system. Capital allocation – the decisions about which industries receive investment and which do not – determines which activities grow and which shrink. In 2023, around US\$7.3 trillion flowed into activities that harm nature, while only US\$220 billion went toward activities that protect or restore it. Until that ratio shifts, the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss will continue to be funded.

Conservation alone cannot reverse what these three systems produce. But the same hope that drove the recoveries of tigers, tuna, elephants, and sea turtles, grounded in clear goals, credible pathways, agency, and resilience, held by enough people for long enough, can also be directed at the systems themselves. When strategic, focused, and sustained effort is brought to bear on a complex system in the right way, change in that system can shift from slow and contested to fast and self-reinforcing. Scientists call this kind of shift a positive tipping point.

Positive tipping points

Transforming systems at this scale can feel impossible because the infrastructure, regulations, markets and habits that hold them in place are enormous and have decades of momentum behind them. But complex systems do not always change in a linear way. Pressure can build beneath the surface for years while little appears to be moving. Then a threshold is crossed, and change accelerates. Tipping points are usually discussed in negative terms, such as the collapse of coral reefs or the loss of the Amazon rainforest as a carbon sink, but the same dynamic can work in the other direction. A positive tipping point occurs when a system crosses a threshold into a healthier state, and the change begins to reinforce itself through amplifying feedback loops. Once that happens, the change becomes faster, cheaper and harder to reverse.

The energy transition is demonstrating this in real time. Twenty years ago, solar power was a niche technology used mostly in satellites and pocket calculators. Today, it is the cheapest source of new electricity generation in most countries, and global solar capacity is doubling every three years. Electric vehicles accounted for more than 25% of new car sales globally in 2024, and coal use is declining in many of the world's wealthiest economies. None of this was guaranteed when it began. It took 50 years of policy support, false starts and patient effort before the economics shifted. Now, the change is reinforcing itself. The global energy system has passed a positive tipping point and entered its acceleration phase, with renewable technologies displacing fossil fuels at a pace few people predicted even a decade ago.

The path to that point was not smooth, and the path forward will not be either. Every phase of the transition has produced resistance from industries and political interests whose dominance is threatened by it. In recent years, that resistance has intensified in some parts of the world. The pushback is part of how transformations work, and it indicates that the change has become disruptive enough to matter. Moving through this phase takes resilience, a willingness to adjust and the determination to keep going.



Every phase of the energy transition has produced resistance from industries and political interests whose dominance is threatened by it.

Food and finance are at an earlier stage. They are in what scientists call the enabling phase, in which ideas are tested, policies developed and coalitions built. Progress feels slow because the visible payoffs are still ahead. But this is the part of the process in which the foundations for acceleration are laid and staying engaged matters most. The levers needed to tip these systems are already known. In food, the priorities are nature-positive production, healthy and sustainable diets, and reductions in food loss and waste. In finance, they are creating regulatory certainty, requiring institutions to value nature and climate as material financial risks, stopping the financing of activities that harm nature, and closing a biodiversity finance gap of around US\$1.3 trillion a year. None of this requires technology that does not exist. It requires decisions and the persistence to keep making them through the slow stretches when the results are not yet visible.

The scale of the financial flows now driving the wrong outcomes shows how much room there is to move. Around US\$470 billion a year is spent globally on agricultural subsidies that drive environmental damage, and around US\$7 trillion supports fossil fuels. Redirecting even a portion of those flows would shift the economics of the entire transformation.

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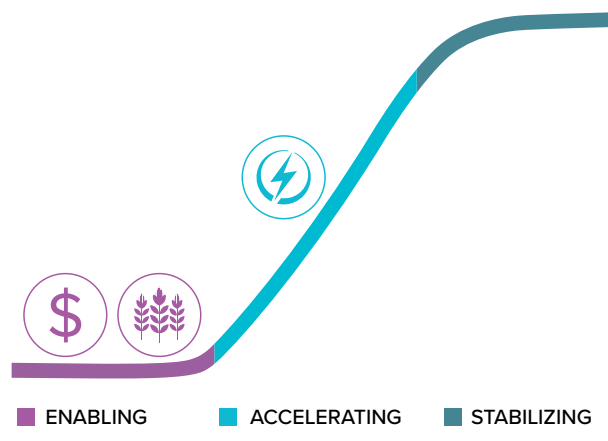


Figure ES.2 The phases of tipping dynamics, or the S-curve: Along the S-curve, positive tipping dynamics proceed through three broad phases of change: enabling, accelerating and stabilizing. Energy is in the accelerating phase, while food and finance are in the enabling phase.

Fairness is part of how this works

A transformation at the scale of energy, food and finance redistributes costs, benefits, jobs and political influence. How that redistribution is handled determines whether the transformation succeeds or falls apart. The people most affected by the loss of nature and the people most affected by the work to address it are often the same people – and often those with the least power to shape the outcome. They include smallholder farmers and fishers, workers in industries that will need to transition, low-income households that will feel changes in food and energy prices first, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities who steward many of the world's most biodiverse lands and waters.

These communities are not stakeholders to be consulted at the end of a process. They are central to whether the process works at all. Evidence from across the world is clear: conservation outcomes are stronger where Indigenous Peoples and local communities have legal recognition of their rights and genuine authority over the lands and waters they manage. Forest loss is significantly lower in Indigenous-managed territories. Fisheries recover faster when local fishing communities help to design and enforce protections. When the people closest to the land and water are part of decision-making, the work tends to last.

The same logic extends across the wider transformation. Workers whose livelihoods are tied to fossil fuels need genuine pathways to new work, with retraining, social protection and investment in the affected regions, rather than abstract promises. Farmers shifting to nature-positive practices need access to finance, technical support and markets that will buy what they produce. Wealthy countries with high consumption footprints need to take responsibility for the environmental damage their consumption causes in the countries from which they import, not only for what happens inside their own borders. And the benefits of new industries, jobs and investment must reach the places and people most exposed to the costs of change.

When transitions concentrate benefits at the top and costs at the bottom, support for change collapses. The people who are excluded often end up defending the very systems we need to leave behind. Fairness in this work decides whether a transformation holds together over time or comes apart under pressure.



When the people closest to the land and water are part of decision-making, the work tends to last.

A whole-of-society approach, anchored in 2030

In 2022, almost every country in the world agreed to a shared plan to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, on the way to a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. That plan is the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the most coordinated commitment to nature any generation has ever made. It sets out clear targets and provides a structure for cooperation, but the action being taken under it is not yet at the scale needed to deliver what it promises. Three things have to change.

First, countries should set commitments that match the scale of their actual global impact, not only what is politically convenient at home. A country whose consumption drives deforestation, water depletion or species loss in other parts of the world must take responsibility for those impacts. A country that holds some of the world's richest biodiversity needs finance and support that reflect the global value of what it is stewarding.

Second, governments need to use the tools available only to them to create the conditions in which positive tipping points become possible. Most actors in the economy cannot move at the pace required without the certainty that government policy provides. Finance is a clear example. A bank that decides on its own to stop financing activities that harm nature loses business to competitors that have not, and this first-mover penalty keeps the whole sector locked into funding the status quo. When governments, central banks, and financial regulators require all institutions to assess and disclose how their lending and investment affects nature and climate, the penalty disappears, and capital can begin to move at scale toward sustainable activities. The same logic applies in energy and food, where subsidy reform, mandatory disclosure, public procurement, tax policy, and clear long-term regulation are the instruments through which governments turn an enabling phase into acceleration. Without them, even the most committed businesses, investors and communities cannot move fast enough.

Governments cannot deliver transformation on their own. A whole-of-society approach means that everyone with the ability to shape outcomes uses what they have. Businesses change what they produce. Investors change where they invest. Subnational governments shape the cities and regions where most people live. Civil society organizations advocate, hold institutions accountable and create public support for change. Indigenous Peoples and local communities exercise authority over the lands and waters they steward. The most durable progress comes from coalitions that hold these contributions together through difficulty.

Not every action will happen through every national government, and some will not be able to wait for multilateral agreement. Some of the most consequential progress is now coming from coalitions of countries acting together where global processes move too slowly to match the urgency. The Tropical Forest Forever Facility, which brings Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Indonesia together with European partners to provide annual compensation for keeping forests standing, is one such effort. The Santa Marta gathering of countries committed to transitioning away from fossil fuels is another. These coalitions sit alongside the Global Biodiversity Framework rather than replacing it. They allow committed governments to move at the pace the science requires while broader processes catch up.

Third, progress must be tracked independently and honestly. Without a clear and credible way to see what countries and other actors are actually doing, what is working, and where things are stuck, commitments drift, momentum fades, and the chance to learn and adjust is lost.





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The urgency of 2030

The information, technology, finance, and framework needed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss are available, and large parts of the world have already begun to act. What is in short supply is time. The targets agreed in the Global Biodiversity Framework are anchored to 2030, the year by which the world has committed to halting and reversing biodiversity loss and making substantial progress in transforming the systems that drive it. Energy has already crossed a positive tipping point and is in its acceleration phase. But food and finance remain in the enabling phase, and they need to reach their own tipping points within this decade if the 2030 goals are to remain within reach. Every year the enabling phase continues without tipping is a year subtracted from the time available for the changes to spread, stabilize and begin to repair what has already been lost.

Triggering those tipping points is the central task of the next several years, and the actions that can do so are known. They include repurposing the subsidies that currently drive environmental damage; requiring financial institutions to disclose how their activities affect nature; using public procurement to create steady demand for food produced in ways that protect ecosystems; setting policy signals strong enough to give businesses and investors the certainty to invest; expanding coalitions of countries willing to act ahead of broader agreement; and giving Indigenous Peoples and local communities genuine authority in shaping the work. None of these levers are sufficient on their own. Used together, with intent and coordination, they can shift the economics, politics and social acceptability of the systems we need to transform fast enough for the change to compound before 2030.

The work will not move in a straight line. There will be setbacks, periods when the results seem too small for the scale of what is needed and stretches when the people doing the work feel exhausted. But none of this means the effort is failing. What determines whether we succeed is whether enough people, institutions and countries stay engaged in the conservation work together for long enough for the change to become self-sustaining.

The species increases and recoveries documented in this report happened because people committed to outcomes they could not guarantee, often for results they would not live to see. The transformations now required in energy, food and finance ask the same of us, at a much larger scale and with much less time. The window in which a different future is still possible is narrowing, but it remains open. We have credible pathways, the capacity to act and a goal worth the work. What 2030 requires is that we use them.



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