

## Making the case for **conservation**

The Convention for Biological Diversity advocates that conservation of biological diversity is a 'common concern of humankind'. Yet charitable giving worldwide does not reflect these values: according to Al Gore, in his film *An Inconvenient Truth*, only 1.5% of donations supports conservation charities compared to 97% given to humanitarian causes (the other 1.5% is to pet charities). With this distinct disparity in charitable donations, why is supporting conservation charities not only a valuable contribution but a necessity?

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**C**onservation seeks to protect biodiversity of the environment; ecosystems, animals and vegetation. This brings copious benefits, from air and fresh water purification, to the pollination of crops and vegetation. These are known as 'ecosystem services'; the processes provided by the environment that support human activities. Despite the abundant benefits, these services are regularly ignored in terms of economic value, resulting in the costs being externalised. In 1997, a scientific journal estimated the average annual value of the benefit of ecosystem services at \$33 trillion. This was almost double the value given to the annual global Gross National Product of \$18 trillion.

The environment in which we live has helped us develop through providing natural resources for our industries, cultural and recreational activities, food and medicine.

1.3 billion people worldwide rely on agriculture, fisheries and

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forests for employment, and conserving these areas helps development, as communities can utilise the environment for their livelihoods. Additionally, conservation protects areas of outstanding beauty, which attracts tourists, who stimulate local economies. Funding conservation charities who work with local communities helps safeguard indigenous knowledge and the continuation of traditional customs and practices that depend on the environment. Effective conservation charities also fund environmental education for local communities, bringing long-lasting benefits.

As well as benefiting local communities, conservation of plant biodiversity profits people worldwide. Protecting plant species is important as it is unknown which will help scientists fight infectious disease; after all it was just one species of fungi that helped produce penicillin. Furthermore with 90% of the world's food deriving from just 20 of the 80,000 species of edible plants, there is vast potential for discovery. Protecting plant biodiversity can enhance food

security by widening the genetics of crops through breeding them with wild species which can improve resistance to diseases and increase crop yields. This enhances food security which is critical with growing populations putting greater pressure on food production.

Conservation charities, like Save the Rhino, often focus on protecting large charismatic endangered species that also help safeguard the ecosystem and other species. 99% of species that ever existed are now extinct and human activity has exacerbated this loss with habitat destruction, logging, pollution, illegal trade and political conflict. Funding and effective action have helped

save endangered species such as the Southern White Rhino (for the moment at least) and Spix's Macaw. Conservation charities play an important role in combining scientific expertise with local knowledge.

According to a study in 2012, it costs an estimated

\$80 billion a year to decrease the risk of 'human-induced' extinction of threatened species and to conserve terrestrial sites of global importance. Financial support is therefore vital for conservation charities. These charities face high costs in their operations, as they have to battle with illegal syndicates who use expensive technology (such as helicopters) to poach animals such as rhinos and tigers for their horns and bones. According to a recent WWF report, the illegal wildlife trade is reputed to be fourth-largest illegal global trade. The growing demand in Asia for these animal products will only increase the costs for conservation charities.

With charitable giving falling in the UK, according to the Charities Aid Foundation (2012), conservation charities need public support more than ever. Save the Rhino receives no UK government funding, yet our work protects the world and its species, for the benefit of us and our children.

