

22.02.2019, Jonathan Watts

World's food supply under severe threat from loss of biodiversity.

The world's capacity to produce food is being undermined by humanity's failure to protect biodiversity, according to the first UN study of the plants, animals and micro-organisms that help to put meals on our plates.

The stark warning was issued by the Food and Agriculture Organisation after scientists found evidence the natural support systems that underpin the human diet are deteriorating around the world as farms, cities and factories gobble up land and pump out chemicals.

The way we eat is killing us – and the planet | Felicity Lawrence

Over the last two decades, approximately 20% of the earth's vegetated surface has become less productive, said the report, launched on Friday.

It noted a "debilitating" loss of soil biodiversity, forests, grasslands, coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds and genetic diversity in crop and livestock species. In the oceans, a third of fishing areas are being overharvested.

Many species that are indirectly involved in food production, such as birds that eat crop pests and mangrove trees that help to purify water, are less abundant than in the past, noted the study, which collated global data, academic papers and reports by the governments of 91 countries.

It found 63% of plants, 11% of birds, and 5% of fish and fungi were in decline. Pollinators, which provide essential services to three-quarters of the world's crops, are under threat. As well as the well-documented [decline of bees](#) and other insects, the report noted that 17% of vertebrate pollinators, such as bats and birds, were threatened with extinction.

Once lost, the species that are critical to our food systems cannot be recovered, it said. "This places the future of our food and the environment under severe threat."

"The foundations of our food systems are being undermined," wrote Graziano da Silva, the director general of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, in an introduction to the study. "Parts of the global report make sombre reading. It is deeply concerning that in so many production systems in so many countries, biodiversity for food and agriculture and the ecosystem services it provides are reported to be in decline."