

Conservation News

Fungi gaining ground at recent CBD and IUCN meetings


Increasing interest in fungal conservation was evident at two recent global conservation events: the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Leaders meeting in Abu Dhabi, UAE (October 2024) and CoP16 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Cali, Colombia (October 2024). In Abu Dhabi, the Fungal Conservation Committee, comprising the chairs of fungal specialist groups and other key contributors, met to review existing quadrennium targets with regards to accomplishments and challenges, to plan for the upcoming year, and to brainstorm emerging opportunities. Two sessions were held for the broader SSC community, which were well attended by members of several plant groups and other related specialist groups. Fungal specialist groups received two awards in honour of increased activities.

In its first 4 years the Fungal Conservation Committee has met many of its initial targets, including major advances in global fungi Red List assessments (from three in 2003 to nearly 1,000 in 2024), the creation of national specialist groups and conservation networks (e.g. the Brazil and Colombia Fungal Specialist Groups; Drechsler-Santos et al., *Oryx*, 57, 421–422; Motato-Vásquez et al., *Oryx*, 57, 691), and establishing productive engagement with the Global Centre for Species Survival based at the Indianapolis Zoo, USA. Thematic specialist groups have been formed on Aquatic Fungi (Fernandes et al., *Oryx*, 58, 282) and on Fungal Use, in partnership with the Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group. This rise in activities has increased scientific output and public interest in fungal conservation, which we hope to build on with increased outreach and educational opportunities.

For example, in 2025, with financial support from the Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group, we plan to host a workshop on fungal conservation and gender in Cotonou, Benin, in conjunction with the fourth meeting of the International Society for Fungal Conservation and a special issue of *Current Conservation* dedicated to fungal conservation.

At CoP16, the newly formed Fungal Conservation Network, comprising members of the Fungal Conservation Committee plus other mycologists, presented initial plans for a Global Strategy for Fungal Conservation. The Strategy will provide tools and resources for countries to include fungi in their conservation efforts and identify a fungal conservation research agenda. Additionally, the UK and Chile presented the Pledge for Fungal Conservation. Efforts to develop the Pledge were led by the Fungi Foundation and 3Fs Initiative, and it received additional support from Colombia, Benin, Spain, Mexico, Italy, Costa Rica, Peru, Ecuador, Cambodia and Guinea. Although the Pledge did not make it onto the latest agenda, Chile made a statement in the final plenary, inviting parties within the context of decision CBD/CoP/15/28 on Biodiversity and Agriculture to submit detailed information on the conservation of fungi within the framework of the Soil Biodiversity Action Plan. This could lead to the inclusion of fungi in national and international legislation, policies and agreements.

I thank members of the Fungal Conservation Committee for review of this piece. Any mistakes are my responsibility.

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