

Celebrate World Environment Day on June 5

Earth911

World Environment Day, celebrated on June 5, is not nearly as famous as Earth Day, the environmental holiday that [turned 50](#) years old on April 22 this year. But it's not just a duplicate, niche holiday. World Environment Day has its own separate history and focus.

If you are unfamiliar with World Environment Day, read on to learn about *the other* international environmental holiday and find out how you can join millions of global citizens who will unite for nature on June 5.

Unique Origins

Unlike [Earth Day](#), which originated as a grassroots American movement, [World Environment Day](#) has always been a cooperative global undertaking sponsored by the United Nations. The United Nations General Assembly designated June 5 as World Environment Day in 1972, marking the first day of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

The United Nations establishes [international days of observance](#) in order to educate its members and the general public on the issues that comprise the organization's mission; to mobilize political will and resources to address global problems globally, and to celebrate what humans can achieve when they unite.

World Environment Day

The United States became the first North American country to host the celebrations in San Francisco in 2005. That year, the theme was green cities. Former Vice President Al Gore and future California Governor Gavin Newsom, both prominent environmentalists, attended the event. Their presence raised the profile of the holiday in the U.S.



Santa Elena Cloud Forest Nature Reserve, Costa Rica, Central America

Time for Nature

In 2020, Colombia takes the baton. Colombia is one of the world's [megadiverse](#) countries, hosting close to 10 percent of the planet's biodiversity. It contains 314 different ecosystems and more than [56,000](#) identified species. Colombia is the world's most biodiverse nation per kilometer. Naturally, then, this year's focus is on biodiversity with the theme "[Time for Nature](#)."

[Biodiversity](#) describes the variety of life on Earth, including the 8 million known plant and animal species on the planet, the ecosystems that house them, and the genetic diversity among them. Biodiversity is not just important because people like variety. The biodiversity of ecosystems creates a complex web of interactions that maintain the whole. Reducing biodiversity plucks threads from the web and threatens to unravel the entire system that sustains us and the rest of life on our planet.

Threats to Biodiversity

Human activities have significantly disturbed three-quarters of the world's land surface – land use is also a [leading factor](#) in climate change. Two-thirds of ocean areas are also impacted by human activity, through [overfishing](#), industrial pollution and oil spills, and [garbage accumulation](#). Wildlife species are disappearing tens to hundreds of times faster now than in the past 10 million years. By 2030, the world may have lost one out of every four known species. Scientists have declared this the [sixth mass extinction](#) event in world history.

The most recent and most well-known extinction event was the end of the Cretaceous period. At that time, 66 percent of the world's species – including the dinosaurs – died off. But it was not the most severe. The Permian period ended 251 million years ago when 96 percent of the world's species died, almost ending life on Earth.

The exact causes of previous extinction events are not fully understood, but they all occurred during periods of rapid [climate change](#). At current rates of species extinction, the sixth event is on track to be [more severe](#) than the one that wiped out the dinosaurs.

Biodiversity in the Pandemic

There is a strong [connection](#) between biodiversity and pandemics. Coronaviruses cause about 1 billion cases of illness and millions of deaths every year. Some 75 percent of emerging infectious diseases in humans are transmitted to people by animals. The risk of [zoonotic disease emergence](#) increases as human activities encroach into natural habitats, enabling wildlife pathogens to cross over to livestock and humans. Preventing and responding to emerging zoonotic diseases requires addressing the impact of human activities on natural systems.

This year, millions of people worldwide will be celebrating World Environment Day digitally. The World Environment Day [website](#) contains quizzes to test your knowledge about biodiversity, as well as practical [action guides](#) for individuals and organizations and for [students](#).

Like everything else this year, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the celebration of World Environment Day. [Sign up](#) to stay informed as people everywhere unite #ForNature.

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