



**LET'S MAKE  
ROOM FOR  
THE LIVING**



**«The Natural World is declining globally at a rate unprecedented in human history - and the rate of extinction of different species is accelerating, already causing serious impacts on the human population around the world ».** These are the words that IBPES (Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) used to sound the alarm in its report published in 2019. Of the 8 million animal and plant species on Earth, the report estimates that around 1 million are now threatened with extinction (...), something « *that has never happened before in the history of humanity* ». And of the estimated 5.9 million terrestrial species, more than 500,000 no longer have the natural habitat necessary for their long-term survival! Additionally, the Covid-19 crisis only reinforces our fears: the retreat of the wild world faced with human pressure favouring the emergence of new pathogens.

## **AN ALARMING ASSESSMENT OF BIODIVERSITY IN FRANCE**

France has not escaped these threats. Nature is regressing as a result of human activity: the artificialising of soil and the fragmentation of natural environments, the over-exploitation of natural resources such as air and water as well as soil pollution, massive use of pesticides in agriculture and hunting. Forests are largely exploited, industrial farming areas are artificialised, watercourses are altered, wetlands are drained, mountain meadows are largely impoverished by pastoralism, and the seas are emptied of fish stocks by overfishing.

There are no longer enough ancient trees in our forests, birds and butterflies are becoming rare in our countryside. Some species of wild animals have almost disappeared. Ecosystems are severely disrupted and can no longer provide the resources they normally offer to both human beings and nature in general: water and air purification, flood and drought mitigation, maintenance of pollination, climate regulation, regulation of the dynamics of pathogens and parasites, etc.

And yet... the variety of landscapes and the wealth of ecosystems in our wonderful country require us to have a real responsibility towards living things : France is home to more than 160,000 species (1), i.e. about 2% of the species known on our planet. This is the greatest biodiversity in Europe.



Today in France, less than 1.54% of the terrestrial metropolitan territory benefits from so-called « strong » protection (2). However, within these areas of « strong » protection, forestry, pastoralism and hunting are still very much present. Hunting is authorised in 3 of 11 National Parks' core areas (Calanques, Cévennes and Forest National Parks), in a large majority of the National Nature Reserves and in most of the Regional Nature Reserves. In addition, hunting and fishing are not prohibited everywhere in the biological reserves. Forests and pastures are exploited in the core areas of mountain national parks and in many nature reserves. Today, it can be estimated that only 0.6% of the French metropolitan land-based territory permits the free expression of natural processes.



## **LET'S OFFER 10% OF OUR TERRITORY TO NATURE, FREE FROM HUMAN INTERVENTION.**

President Emmanuel Macron declared in May 2019 that he wanted to protect 30% of natural areas on land and at sea, of which 1/3 « in full natural state » (which in the meantime has become « in strong protection »), i.e. 10% by 2030. This objective is enshrined in the Biodiversity Strategy of France and the European Union 2020-2030. But what definition should be given to the « full natural state » or « strong protection » referred to by President Macron ? Faced with the urgency of preserving nature and human beings, we welcome the declarations made, which could be a real revolution, while at the same time fearing the artifices of language. Strong protection must not be a soft consensus that would prevent us from winning the battle for biodiversity.

In February 2009, the European Parliament adopted a report calling on the Member States to develop large areas of « virgin » nature. Europe's strong protection was defined by the Wild Europe initiative in 2012: « **A wilderness is an area governed by natural**



***processes. It is composed of native habitats and species, and large enough for the effective ecological functioning of natural processes. It is unmodified or only slightly modified, without intrusive or extractive human activity, settlements, infrastructure or visual disturbance.*** » This means an area without hunting, cutting of timber, exploitation of land or mineral resources, or species control.

- Let's reinforce the French notion of strong protection to ensure that the 10% promised is freely evolving (in full naturalness) by adopting the European definition of wilderness areas (3).
- Let's create zones of free evolution within areas that are still too poorly protected (Regional Natural Parks, Natura 2000 areas, etc.) but also where it will be beneficial to new territories. Let us create new tools to facilitate their implementation.
- Let us systematically aim for the presence of all the components of an ecosystem left to evolve freely in order to guarantee its optimal functioning.
- Let us encourage private owners to return some of their plots to the wilderness with a long-term guarantee.
- Let us include these proposals in France's new 2020-2030 Protected Areas strategy.

Let's stop trying to control and exploit the totality of spaces and ecosystems, let's let nature take the direction it wants in certain places! Because free, autonomous, spontaneous and wild nature has an astonishing capacity for repair, provided we give it the space and time to do so. Without any human intervention whatsoever, the forest is reconstituted, the fauna returns and finds its natural density without the need for regulation.

The demonstrated urgency of such measures calls for a strong willingness to implement them. But we also know that the guarantee of real progress in this direction rests, beyond the means, on the quality of the dialogues and consultations that will accompany them. Let us therefore create the conditions for a demanding exchange of views, the basis for clear decisions that are more likely to be shared (4).

The decline of biodiversity is not inevitable. **Let's make room for the living !**

## THE SIGNATORIES :

### Personalities:

**Isabelle Autissier**, sailor and writer

**Jean-Michel Bertrand**, photographer, wildlife film-maker and producer

**Gilles Clément**, landscape gardener, botanist, entomologist, biologist and writer

**Gilbert Cochet**, attached to the National Museum of Natural History, expert at the Council of Europe, expert at the Regional Scientific Council for Natural Heritage

**Jean-Baptiste Dumond**, naturalist and photographer

**Stéphane Durand**, publisher and author

**Jean-Claude Génot**, environmental engineer, writer

**Marc Giraud**, writer, naturalist, columnist

**Francis Hallé**, botanist, biologist and dendrologist

**Nicolas Hulot**, Honorary President of the Nicolas Hulot Foundation

**Béatrice Kremer-Cochet**, expert at the Regional Scientific Council for Natural Heritage

**Virginie Maris**, research director at the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research), specialist in environmental philosophy

**Roger Mathieu**, naturalist, writer

**Baptiste Morizot**, teacher-researcher in philosophy

**Vincent Munier**, wildlife photographer

**Jacques Perrin**, actor, producer

**Matthieu Ricard**, Tibetan Buddhist monk, essayist and photographer

**Sylvain Tesson**, writer-traveller

### NGOs:



### Sources :

(1) MNHN 2015: 160,612 species (out of an estimated 8-10 million worldwide), i.e. 2%.

(2) INPN 30 October 2020 : National park core areas (0.77% of the territory) - Biotope or geotope protection orders (0.32% of the territory) - National, regional and Corsican nature reserves (0.36% of the territory) - Directed and integral forest biological reserves (0.09% of the territory)

(3) Definition of the 2012 Wild Europe initiative

(4) For our part, we are in discussion and convergence of reflection with the associations Francis Hallé for a Primary Forest (which drew E. Macron's attention to his project, who responded favourably to the approach) (<https://www.foretprimaire-francishalle.org/>), ASPAS (<https://www.aspas-nature.org/>) and others who will be taking position in the coming weeks.

**Photographs :** F. Cahez, T. Cugnod, R.Collange, JP. Bouveret