

A fraction of world's military spending could help save biodiversity

Just 2.5 per cent of the world's annual military expenditure could increase the effectiveness of protected areas and provide environmental, social and economic benefits, according to a leading ecologist from the University of Queensland.



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Associate Professor James Watson, the newly-elected president of the Society for Conservation Biology and a member of the Wildlife Conservation Society, is lead author on a [paper](#) in *Conservation Letters* that has found that protected areas are essential to biodiversity conservation, yet few are being effectively managed.

‘Many threatened species, such as the Asian elephant, the tiger and all rhinoceros species, as well as numerous plants, reptiles and amphibians, survive thanks to protected areas,’ Dr Watson said.

‘The amount of land and sea designated as formally protected has markedly increased over the past century, but there is still a major shortfall in political commitments to enhance the coverage and effectiveness of protected areas.

‘Financial support for protected areas is dwarfed by the benefits that they provide, but these returns depend on effective management.’

Protected areas covering about 15 per cent of land and three per cent of oceans face challenges from funding shortfalls, climate change and an escalating poaching crisis.

Dr Watson said protected zones did not always encompass the most important areas for biodiversity.

He said allocating US\$45 billion to protected areas annually – just 2.5 per cent of global military expenditure – could help manage those areas so they could contribute fully to the well-being of the planet.

‘Protected areas conserve biodiversity and sustain a large proportion of the world’s poorest people by providing food, water, shelter and medicine,’ Dr Watson said.

‘They play a key part in climate change mitigation and adaptation and bolster national economies through tourism revenues.

‘Alarmingly, our research found an increase in governments – in both developing and developed countries, including Australia – backtracking on their commitments through funding cuts and changes in policy.

‘Governments cannot be solely responsible for ensuring that protected areas fulfil their potential, but it is essential that they engage actively with business and community groups to find new, innovative ways to fund and manage protected areas.’

Dr Watson’s comes ahead of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Parks Congress 2014 – a once-in-a-decade global forum on protected areas being held in Sydney this week.

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