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Sir David Attenborough calls for new relationship with nature in response to coronavirus pandemic

Sir David's call comes as Fauna & Flora International launches first crisis fund in response to the pandemic to protect global conservation efforts

Sir David Attenborough has called for a “new relationship that respects rather than exploits the wonders of nature,” after warnings from scientists that habitat destruction, agricultural intensification and wildlife trade sowed the seeds for the coronavirus pandemic.

“As the world responds to this pandemic, we must be led by the science, and the science is telling us that the destruction of nature, and encroachment of humans and industry into natural habitats, is making the emergence of new and dangerous viruses ever-more likely,” **said Sir David, a vice-president of Fauna & Flora International (FFI)**. “The finger of blame cannot be pointed at the natural world for this crisis, but in our relationship with it, and we must urgently act to create a new relationship that respects rather than exploits the wonders of nature.”

There is a substantial body of evidence linking the expansion of human activity into natural areas, agricultural intensification, and exploitation of wild species to increasing rates of spill-over of infectious diseases from wild animals to humans.

World's first conservation crisis support fund

Sir David's call comes as FFI launches the world's first conservation crisis fund in response to the pandemic. Funding for conservation has significantly declined, especially in countries and projects more dependent on ecotourism for revenues. There is also evidence that illegal poaching, overfishing and deforestation are on the rise.

The fund – FFI Partner Crisis Support Fund – has been seeded with an initial \$1 million from Arcadia – a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, and will distribute money to a range of local conservation groups with whom FFI currently partners, including in Vietnam, Honduras, Belize, Kenya and Mozambique.

“When the pandemic hit we knew there was a real danger that it could create a conservation crisis and that we needed to respond,” **said Mark Rose, FFI Chief Executive**. “This fund is the first of its kind in response to the pandemic and will help ensure that this crisis doesn't undermine the decades of hard work that have gone into safeguarding endangered wildlife and habitats around the world. FFI works in more than 40 countries and has a track record of operating under challenging circumstances stretching back well over a century. We'll be bringing all of this knowledge to bear in supporting our partners in their work to protect the natural world – work that is now more important than ever.”

Organisations were selected on the basis of immediate, priority needs and where FFI support was deemed essential to safeguard their future. They include Ya'axche Conservation Trust in Belize,

which protects more than 300,000 hectares of land home to endangered species such as jaguars and howler monkeys; the Northern Rangelands Trust, a large consortium of community conservancies in northern and coastal Kenya; and the OI Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya, home to the world's last two northern white rhinos.

Richard Vigne, Managing Director, OI Pejeta Conservancy said:

"In these uncertain and unstable times, it is so helpful to receive the support of Fauna & Flora International through their crisis fund. The conservation world is currently at a standstill, with many organisations struggling to stay alive. This of course includes OI Pejeta which expects to see a 90% drop in tourism revenues during 2020. FFI has been by our side for more than two decades and today are again helping us to secure the future of this organisation. We sincerely commend FFI for this initiative and for supporting conservation programmes on the ground."

Christina Garcia, Executive Director of Ya'axche said:

"The timely and much needed financial support will come a long way for Ya'axche. It will not only help in the retention of key staff members during this unprecedented time; but also allow for continued support to communities in the Maya Golden Landscape where we work."

The Maya Golden Landscape in Belize links the Maya Mountains to the Caribbean Sea, a critically important wildlife corridor.

FFI is seeking additional funding to enable us to provide longer-term support to our partners, and we will shortly be launching an appeal aiming to raise a further USD \$1 million as part of the next phase of the FFI Partner Crisis Support Fund.

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Notes to editors:

1. For more detail on the partners and projects being supported by the FFI Partner Crisis Support Fund please visit: http://cms.fauna-flora.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FFI_Partner-Crisis-Support-Fund-.pdf

For further information please contact:

Nathan Williams (Press, Fauna & Flora International)
Tel: +44 (0)1223 749 010
Email: nathan.williams@fauna-flora.org

About Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and that enhance human well-being. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide, FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world's longest established international wildlife conservation organisation and a registered charity.