



# India's biodiversity-rich zones also 'hotspots' of human impacts

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## **It ranks 16th in the world with 35 species affected on an average**

- Human impacts on species occur across 84% of the earth's surface, finds a study published in PLOS Biology, an international journal dedicated to biological science.
- Southeast Asian tropical forests — including India's biodiversity-rich Western Ghats, Himalaya and the north-east — also fall in this category; India ranks 16th in such human impacts, with 35 species impacted on average.
- A team of scientists led by James Allan (University of Queensland) found this when they mapped the distribution of eight human activities — including hunting and conversion of natural habitats for agriculture — in areas occupied by 5,457 threatened birds, mammals and amphibians worldwide.

## **Various threats**

- Using sources, including the recently-updated Human Footprint data, they found that a staggering 1,237 species are impacted by threats in more than 90% of their habitat; 395 species are affected by threats across their entire range.
- While the impact of roads is highest (affecting 72% of terrestrial areas), crop lands affect the highest number of threatened species: 3,834.
- Malaysia ranks first among the countries with the highest number of impacted species (125).
- India ranks 16th (35 threatened species affected on average).
- Southeast Asian tropical forests — including those in India's Western Ghats, Himalaya and north-east — are among the 'hotspots' of threatened species.

## **Cool spots**

- However, these very areas are also 'cool-spots' (the world's last refuges where high numbers of threatened species still persist).
- Cool-spots could be the result of protection or because of intact habitat that has not been cleared yet.
- Identifying such areas could aid conservation and development planning for countries.
- However, these refugia do not necessarily have to be off-limits to human development, just free of the actions that directly threaten species there, add the scientists.
- With India having the world's second largest road network, we really need to plan for development that keeps wildlife conservation as a primary goal in biodiversity-rich areas.

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