

016 Springs under threat: mobilising urgent action for neglected freshwater systems

CONSIDERING that springs, because of their hydrogeological processes, are of significant geological interest and are often located in areas with rich geological heritage;

CONSIDERING ALSO that springs link groundwater to surface water, acting as vital connectors between these ecosystems and supporting unique biodiversity;

CONSIDERING FURTHER that natural springs are among the richest terrestrial biotopes, often hosting hundreds of species within a few square metres, making them 'super biodiversity hotspots';

CONSIDERING MOREOVER that springs hold significant cultural, spiritual and religious importance in many places of the world;

HIGHLIGHTING that springs contain species of potentially high biotechnological value, due to their unique characteristics;

HIGHLIGHTING that springs are rich in endemic taxa (crenobionts) and constitute the only refuge for rare, endangered, highly sensitive and ancient species, preserved through isolation, particularly in more developed regions;

MINDFUL that research shows that each small spring stronghold results from long-term isolated evolution, and constitutes a unique biological cosmos;

AWARE that springs are among the rarest and most fragile habitats, threatened by climate change, groundwater pollution and overexploitation of water resources;

CONCERNED at the accelerated loss of springs and the disappearance of entire springs on a territorial level;

FURTHER CONCERNED that this trend may conceal a silent but massive biological extinction;

HIGHLIGHTING that springs are among the least explored and most neglected habitats, that de facto, or for reasons of scale, they are not protected throughout the world;

RECOGNISING that much of the biota in spring habitats remains undiscovered;

MINDFUL of the identification crisis, where experts familiar with spring biodiversity are few and declining; and

FURTHER HIGHLIGHTING the urgent need to build capacity within the scientific and conservation community to ensure conservation efforts are science-based and effective;

The IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025, at its session in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates:

1. REQUESTS the Director General to integrate springs into the water stewardship elements of IUCN's Nature 2030 draft Programme (2026–2029);
2. REQUESTS the Commissions to establish an inter-Commission Task Force on the protection of springs, including the Species Survival Commission (SSC), the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and the Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM);
3. REQUESTS SSC and CEM members to contribute to monitoring, restoration, recovery and Red List status assessment of the biodiversity of springs;
4. URGES the IUCN Commissions to raise greater awareness, strengthen capacity, and promote efforts that conserve and advance the protection of biodiversity of springs;

5. ENCOURAGES State Members and their regional governments to adopt effective measures to conserve spring biodiversity, geodiversity and geological heritage;

6. URGES State Members to prioritise spring conservation in the Union's policies and strategies on biological and geological diversity, and to recognise:

a. springs as key biotopes for aquatic biodiversity and prioritise them as habitats of community interest; and

b. natural springs as groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and encourage their monitoring and management; and

7. URGES States and government agencies to:

a. include springs and pools in national policy goals;

b. increase representation of springs and pools in Protected and Conserved Areas (Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3);

c. designate sacred springs as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) cultural and spiritual reserves; and

d. call for proper spring restoration (Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 2).