



"The work of the IPBES enables policy makers to better understand complex mechanisms as well as possible alternative courses of action and, on this basis, to more effectively address the ongoing loss of biodiversity and the destruction of habitats," said EuroNatur President Prof. Thomas Potthast.

"We can be the generation of change"

EuroNatur Award 2021 goes to scientists of the World Biodiversity Council

"We were sweating through all stages of the process," reveals Dr Yunne-Jai Shin. What the marine researcher has achieved, together with many other scientists from the World Biodiversity Council IPBES, is extraordinary: the researchers have compiled, evaluated and interlinked all the knowledge that exists on the subject of biodiversity. On this basis, they have succeeded in designing scenarios for the future and in identifying tangible ways of living in harmony with nature.

On 14 October, the IPBES community of more than 1,000 researchers received the EuroNatur Award 2021. Marine ecologist Dr Yunne-Jai Shin (France), ecological economist Dr Eszter Kelemen (Hungary) and German environmental scientist and agricultural biologist Prof. Josef Settele accepted the award on their behalf. In an interview, the three scientists talk about why they are full of hope despite the alarming findings of their report (see box).



”This global assessment was a big step. It brought together not only scientific knowledge but also indigenous and local knowledge in the field of biodiversity.“

Dr. Eszter Kelemen



”We think of future generations, of people in extreme parts of the world, this goes far beyond our own personal interests.“

Dr. Yunne-Jai Shin



What the World Biodiversity Council (IPBES) has to report

Established in 2012, the World Biodiversity Council (Intergovernmental Science–Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, IPBES), is an intergovernmental body, linked to the United Nations at the interface between science and policy. Its core task is to produce reports on the current state of biodiversity and the services that ecosystems provide to humans. For this purpose, the member states of the World Biodiversity Council nominate experts to prepare the reports. The 2019 global assessment in particular generated worldwide media coverage. IPBES President Prof. Robert Watson warned of the current mass extinction with a dramatic loss of animal and plant species. Many ecosystem services, he said, cannot be replaced; this would also mean significant consequences for the survival of human kind. A recent joint report by scientists from IPBES and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) makes clear, how closely biodiversity and climate crises are linked and that integrated solutions are needed. An English version of the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) of the IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services is available on the Internet at [uronatur.org/award2021](http://euronatur.org/award2021)





Delicate, colorful, versatile - butterflies are a symbol of diversity in nature. The picture shows two common blue butterflies, male and female on sand thyme flowers.

What motivates you to engage in the IPBES process?

Dr. Kelemen: My motivation comes from the idea of making a real-life impact. If someone works in research, then processes might take years and the outcomes are not always easily visible. On the personal side, when asked what her mom does, my daughter used to tell people that I'm working to protect the environment, to make people become respectful towards nature. I used to ask myself if my work really contributes enough to this aim. IPBES is a great opportunity to achieve this impact.

Dr. Shin: Motherhood changed a lot of my perspectives too. It might be my status of being a mother, which motivates me to make my work as useful as possible. When IPBES was created in 2012, there was so much hope about this platform. I wanted to be part of this inspiring community.

Prof. Settele: We know so much, but so little is happening. Finding ways to be heard in public, and in politics, is crucial. The main goal is to spread the information and enable decision-makers to act with a solid foundation.

What is so innovative about the IPBES Global Assessment, in which the three of you have been involved?

Dr. Shin: I think the biggest impact was the realization that everything is interlinked: demographic growth, the ways we consume, how we produce food, the way we organize systems of governance or economic systems etc. IPBES has triggered a real change in perception of the role of biodiversity in our quality of life.

Did the Global Assessment meet your expectations or were there any surprises?

Prof. Settele: The biggest surprise for me was that most of the ideas that we put into the summary for policy makers made it through the plenary of IPBES. One of the core messages was questioning gross domestic product as a kind of main indicator that defines quality of life.

Dr Shin, you were engaged in the chapter of the assessment which shows scenarios for the future. Would you say that we are at a crossroads?

Dr. Shin: When I started working on this chapter and talking with colleagues about what they would write in their parts, I realized there was an alarming tone. All the multiplied evidence went in the same direction for biodiversity: down, down, crashing down. However, the more we investigated, the more we were able to report on scientific studies that demonstrated plausible solutions. The scenarios are extremely powerful tools because they help having a vision, which means you are shaping a future. So, at the end of the process, I became very optimistic.

However, isn't there still a lot of awareness raising needed? One thing that concerns EuroNatur and our partners a lot is that climate change is a big topic in politics, and biodiversity is suffering from the measures to fight climate change.

Prof. Settele: For the biodiversity topic, there is still a long way to go. Not all of these greenish things to fight climate change are green, but rather, they cause many more difficulties than they solve problems. We are trying our best to come across with this problem.

Which takes some time, but at least we are on track. For example, we did so in the frame of the first joint venture of IPBES and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC [Editor's Note: A summary can be found on the Internet under the link [uronatur.org/award2021](https://euronatur.org/award2021)]. and we keep on pushing the decision makers.

Dr. Shin: IPCC did a lot of work to change mindsets. I think people are ready to listen now, including the private sector and the financial sector. Banks are starting to invest a lot in the environment - for the moment, it's more than 90 percent of green bonds dedicated to climate actions but they are looking forward to being able to do the same for biodiversity. I can see that there is a lot of movement in the different sectors, a lot of willingness to change things. My opinion is that it's very urgent that we put some momentum on this energy because the models again show that we have to act now.

”It would be a good step forward if we jointly tackled climate change and biodiversity loss.“

Prof. Josef Settele



I can feel that you are really convinced that there is hope. Why is that? The rate of biodiversity loss is still very alarming!

Dr. Shin: One positive aspect born from this disastrous COVID 19 period is the experience that we are able to act quickly. We saw that things are possible at all levels: in terms of investments, in terms of changes in behavior, in terms of the roles of every single sector like the media, politics etc.

You are all scientists, and scientists need to be neutral and objective, but this topic seems to be very emotional. Is this a contradiction?

Dr. Kelemen: I think that being both passionate and scientifically sound is possible at the same time. We are not fabricating the evidence in terms of supporting our passion. When we prepared all the reports, we used very robust approaches to synthesize the available evidence. Once the evidence is there, you see with your own eyes what is happening and what the options ahead of us are. Then we can put our heart into it and create messages, which other people really understand.

Dr. Shin: When people ask us scientists about biodiversity we start to speak from our hearts. Because restoring or holding the loss of biodiversity is important for the whole planet.

We are in a period of time where we as scientists urgently need to strengthen the difference between strong knowledge and beliefs. We are not only IPBES, but we are representing the whole scientific community working on biodiversity. We assembled a lot of knowledge from different parts of the world. In the political dialog and in the dialog with the private sector we are a big counterpart.

Do you think that the self-understanding of scientists or science has changed and, therefore, that their role in society has also changed? Do scientists maybe turn into people who try to save the planet?

Dr. Kelemen: Scientists are getting out of their so-called ivory towers more easily, in the sense of running research projects, which focus on real life problems. I see more and more

researchers who try to push and communicate their results to the target audience. I do believe that there is a change in science overall.

Dr. Shin: Yes, definitely. I can observe this especially in the young generation. I worked in South Africa for several years. There are many bridges between the world of academic science and scientists working in NGOs. They do great work, more applied science. I think we need those bridges with NGOs like EuroNatur, with local associations etc. These are very important to have a concrete impact.

And you are here because you, representing the whole IPBES community, are the winners of EuroNatur award 2021. What does this prize mean for you?

Dr. Kelemen: This award makes me proud, especially when I look at all the others who have received the prize like the "brave women of Kruščica" who protected their river. This award really goes to groups of people who make important steps at a social level.

Prof. Settele: It is an important next step in bringing across the message of IPBES. It is a great opportunity to get better known in society.

”It was a successful event and it impressed me. It was impressive too, because you could see how much EuroNatur has developed since its beginnings, how it is networked and what influence it has gained.“

Dietrich Langbein, long-time EuroNatur donor attended the award ceremony on Mainau Island.

What you have achieved with this Global Assessment is also symbolic: we all need to work together when it comes to saving the planet. It might be difficult to bring so many scientists together, right?

Dr. Shin: Indeed, and even so many scientists from different disciplines! There were different steps in the process where we were not in our comfort zone. You were obliged to leave your boxes behind like "you are a marine person", "you are a forest person" or whatever. We learned a lot from each other. It's not just an addition of knowledge, but it's a synergy because we succeeded in really understanding what our colleagues are doing.

Prof. Settele: We come from certain disciplines, we have certain backgrounds, but we have embedded this in the global picture. This was a very good exercise; a huge experience and it was tough. The basic feeling was: we will never manage this. But miraculously, in the end, we came up with something very good.

Some supporters of EuroNatur say they have lost hope that we as humans will manage to save our planet. However, at the same time, they emphasize that they don't want to give up and therefore continue to support EuroNatur's work. What would you like to tell these people?

Prof. Settele: It's never too late until we are gone and this is hopefully a long time to come! Many people like to take this "5 minutes to 12" rhetoric. This would mean the time has stopped 30 years ago because even then it was "5 minutes to 12". We are at an important point in history now but if it's 12 o'clock, is it then too late? There is always a future; it is up to us to modify it.

Dr. Kelemen: The last chapter of the Global Assessment was about options and opportunities for decision makers. No matter whether you are a decision maker on a national level, the head of a company or a farmer: we all have a choice!

Dr. Shin: Every single individual decision and action is so important. We have all been contributing to the loss of biodiversity, so we are also able to make a change in the right direction now. We can be the generation of change. IPBES work shows that we have the means and some of the keys to be able to live in harmony with nature. We can build the foundation of this world for our children.

Interview: Katharina Grund

The speeches given at the award ceremony, pictures and a video stream of the event can be found at: euronatur.org/award2021

PRESS REVIEW

Süddeutsche Zeitung online, 13 October 2021

Despite accelerating climate change and dramatic species extinction, many scientists shy away from talking to politicians, says biodiversity researcher Josef Settele. [...] The agricultural biologist from Allgäu, Germany, is one of the three main authors of a report by the World Biodiversity Council IPBES on the state of the Earth in terms of species protection. On Thursday, he will receive the EuroNatur Award for outstanding achievements in nature conservation on behalf of the IPBES in Constance.

Deutschlandfunk, 14 October 2021

"Not everyone is up for venturing into the shark tank of politics in addition to pursuing their actual scientific work," says the ecology professor at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research in Halle (Saale), speaking to the German Press Agency (dpa). As a result of doing so, he says, politicians now take his concerns about species protection much more seriously than they used to.

Bayerische Staatszeitung, 13 October 2021

The President of France, Germany's environment minister, hunters from Lower Austria: when it comes to species protection, they all rely on Josef Settele's work. [...] His role is not to tell politicians what to do, emphasizes Settele, but to inform them so they can make decisions.

