



## INDICATOR: AWARENESS OF BIODIVERSITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO HUMAN HEALTH

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** Engage People

**TARGET:** 2. By 2015, 50% of Ontarians understand biodiversity and its role in maintaining their health and well-being.

**THEME:** Conservation Response – Education and Awareness

### **Background Information:**

Biodiversity plays an important role in the health and well-being of humans. “Our personal health, and the health of our economy and human society, depends on the continuous supply of various ecological services that would be extremely costly or impossible to replace” (CBD 2010). Clean air and water, climate regulation, provision of pollinators for food production, access to outdoor recreational opportunities, and medicinal compounds are just a few of the ways that biodiversity impacts human health and well-being.

People are more likely to take actions to conserve biodiversity if they understand the concept and its importance to their lives and feel a connection to nature (Simaika and Samways 2010; Hughes et al. 2018). *Ontario’s Biodiversity Strategy, 2011*, (OBS 2011) includes the key actions that both the relevance of biodiversity and the vision that “people value, protect and enhance biodiversity and the ecosystem services essential for human health and well-being” be communicated to the public.

The Canadian Nature Survey (FPTGC 2014) found that 71% of the 1,011 Ontario mail-in survey respondents had heard of the term ‘biodiversity’ and around the same number were familiar with the term ‘ecosystem services’. Respondents were provided with the definition of biodiversity and were not asked questions regarding their understanding of the term. Because Target 2 of Ontario’s Biodiversity Strategy relates specifically to Ontarians’ understanding of biodiversity and its importance to human health, the Ontario Biodiversity Council commissioned telephone surveys to report on this target.

This indicator presents the results from the Biodiversity Awareness Surveys, conducted in October 2014, October 2016 and again in January 2020.

### **Data Analysis:**

Data about Ontarians’ understanding of biodiversity were collected as part of a phone survey done on behalf of the Ontario Biodiversity Council by ECO Environmental Communication Options and Oracle Poll Research in October 2014 (ECO 2014) and again by Oracle Poll Research in October 2016 (Oracle Poll Research 2016) and in January 2020 (Oracle Poll Research 2020). Respondents were asked 10 questions related to biodiversity. This indicator uses data from four of the survey’s questions related to understanding of the term biodiversity and its relationship to our health and well-being, and compares results over time.

In 2014 and 2016 the poll was administered to 1,000 people aged 18 years or older, and in 2020 was administered to 1,500 people 18 years of age or older. The margin of error for the 2020 sample of 1,500 people is  $\pm 2.5\%$ , 19/20 times



Results from the Ontario survey are also reviewed against data collected for select countries around the world for comparative purposes.

**Results:**

**Trend:** Improvement      **Data Confidence:** High      **Geographic Extent:** Provincial

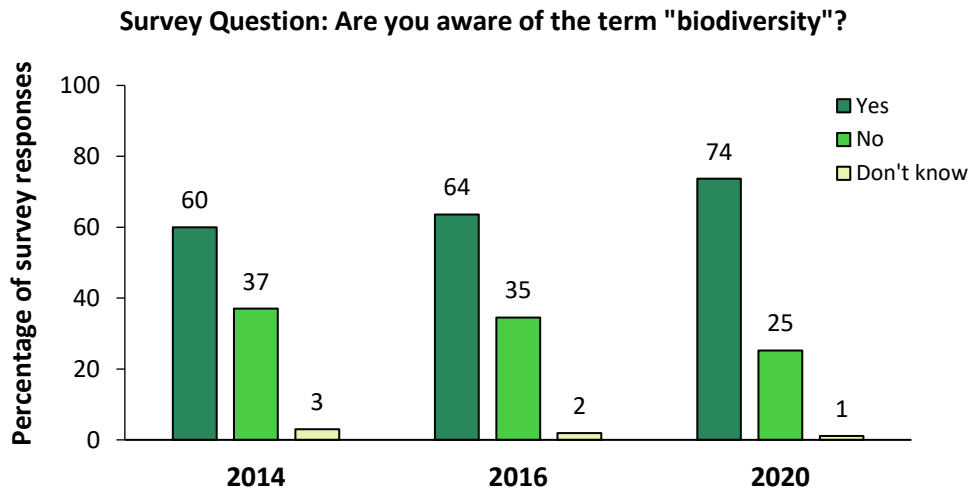


Figure 1. Biodiversity awareness survey responses, by percentage, to the question ‘Are you aware of the term biodiversity?’ in 2014, 2016 (n = 1,000/yr.) and 2020 (n = 1,500).



Figure 2. 2020 Ontario biodiversity awareness levels compared to awareness levels reported between 2012 and 2019 for select countries around the world. Image reproduced (with modification) with permission from the Union for Ethical BioTrade.



**Survey Question: Which of the following definitions best fit your understanding of biodiversity?**

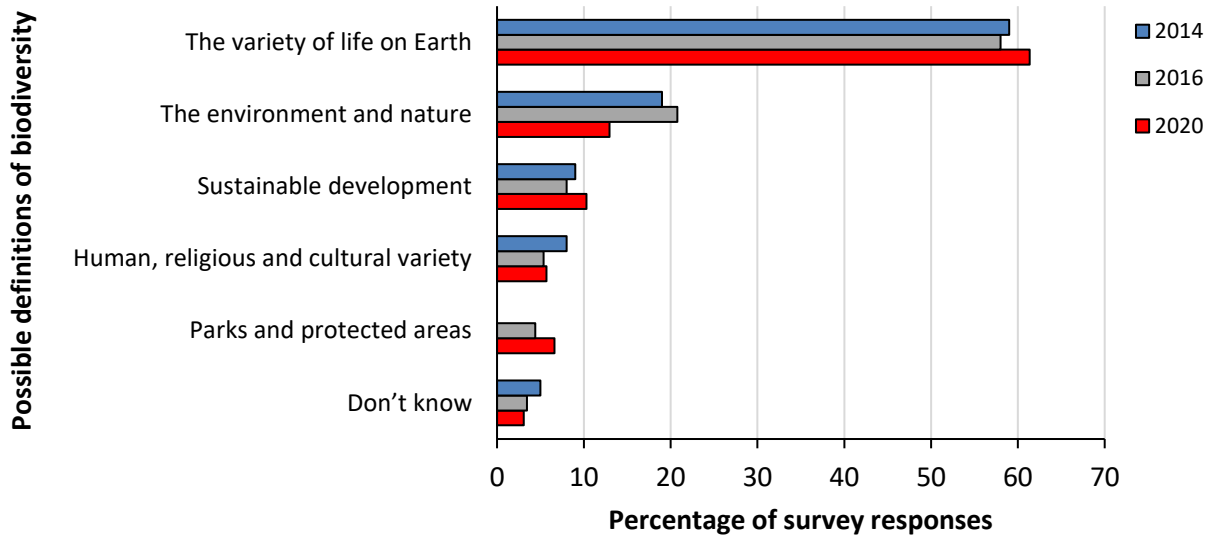


Figure 3. Survey respondents' definitions of biodiversity in 2014 ( $n = 598$ ), 2016 ( $n = 636$ ) and 2020 ( $n = 1,105$ ). Only respondents that were aware of the term biodiversity were asked this question. 'Parks and protected areas' was a new option added in 2016 and retained in 2020.

**Survey Question: Biodiversity plays an important role in maintaining my health and well-being**

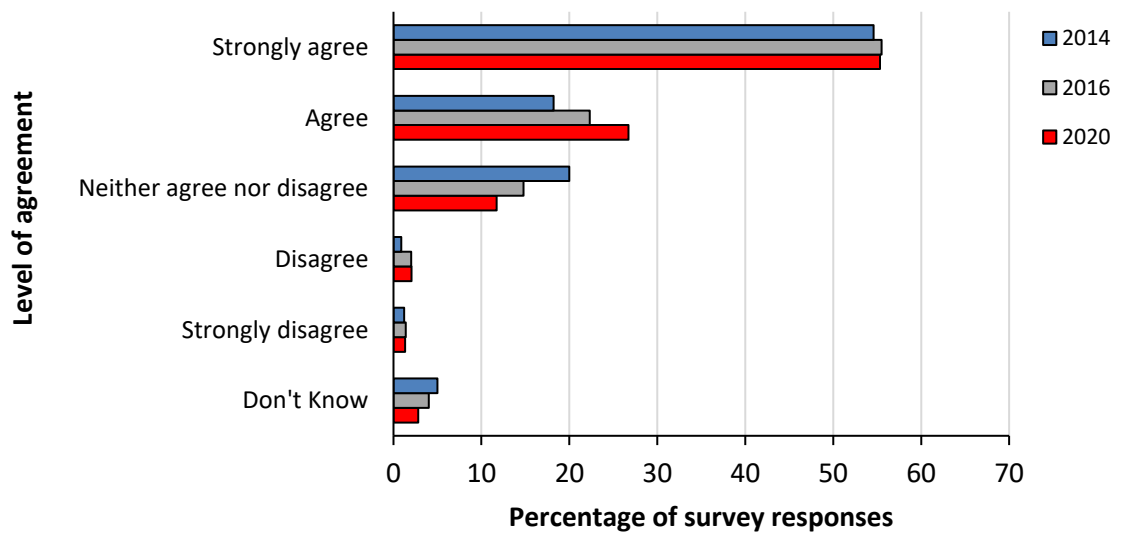


Figure 4. Percentage of survey responses to the statement, 'Biodiversity plays an important role in maintaining my health and well-being' in 2014, 2016 ( $n = 1,000/yr.$ ) and 2020 ( $n = 1,500$ ).



**Survey Question: In your opinion, what aspect of biodiversity has the greatest impact on your health?**

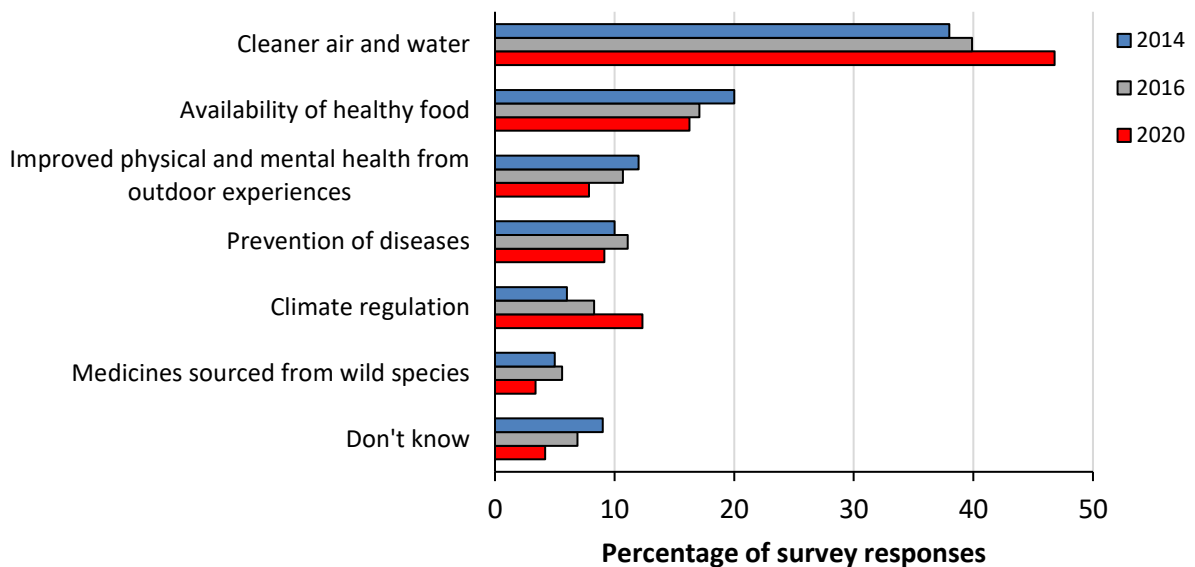


Figure 5. Percentage of survey participants’ responses regarding which aspect of biodiversity has the greatest impact on their health in 2014, 2016 (*n* = 1,000/yr.) and 2020 (*n* = 1,500).

**Status:**

- In 2020, 74% of respondents were aware of the term biodiversity, representing a 14% increase over 2014.
- Of the respondents aware of biodiversity, 61% defined it correctly and another 30% chose a partial definition of the term.
- 82% of respondents agreed with the statement that biodiversity plays an important role in maintaining their health and well-being (i.e., 27% agreed and 55% strongly agreed), representing a 9% increase over 2014.
- In 2020, cleaner air and water was chosen as the aspect of biodiversity with the greatest impact on human health (47%), with the next most mentioned aspect being availability of healthy food (16%). Climate regulation followed at 12%—representing a 6% increase over 2014—and prevention of diseases was selected by 9% of respondents.
- The survey results show that Ontarians’ awareness about biodiversity and its importance to their health have reached the 50% target outlined in Ontario’s Biodiversity Strategy, 2011.



## Links:

**Related Targets:** N/A

**Related Themes:** N/A

## **Web Links:**

Union for Ethical BioTrade <http://ethicalbiotrader.org/>

Canadian federal, provincial and territorial working group on biodiversity <http://www.biodivcanada.ca>

## **References:**

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## **Citation**

Ontario Biodiversity Council. 2020. State of Ontario's Biodiversity [web application]. Ontario Biodiversity Council, Peterborough, Ontario. [Available at: <http://ontariobiodiversitycouncil.ca/sobr> (Date Accessed: May 2020)].