

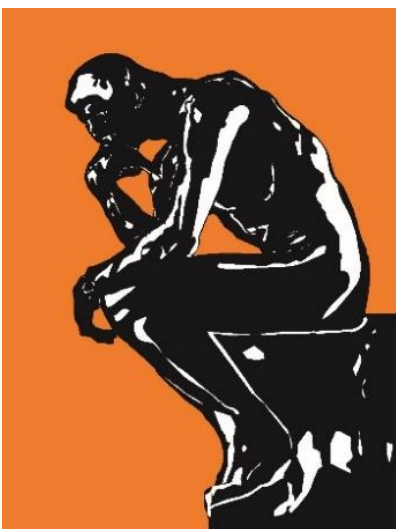
The beauty industry and biodiversity: “The Story of Kindness”

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“[...] the virtue of sacrifice is critical to shaping a daring and fearless leader of the bird village.

From “The Virtue of Sacrifice”; *The Kingfisher Story Collection* (2022)

With the increasing volume of specialized scientific knowledge and widespread public information on climate change, awareness of the precarious state of the global ecosystem has become much more comprehensive. Greenhouse gas emissions are receiving significantly more attention from various development agendas. A recent example is the

carbon tax bill proposed by US Congressman Salud Carbajal of Santa Barbara, which suggests applying a \$15 per ton CO₂ fee to all fossil fuels extracted in the United States. Simultaneously, “adjustments” will be imposed on the prices of imported fuels into the United States to reflect the carbon content of the raw materials, ensuring that American producers are not disadvantaged in competition. Almost all attention is focused on carbon (Welsh, 2023).

However, CO₂ and greenhouse gases (GHG) are just one front in the current battle against environmental degradation. Alongside the GHG emissions issue, biodiversity loss is also emerging as a grave concern (Nguyen & Vuong, 2021).

Biodiversity loss seems more ominous as emissions continue to soar, with the 2023 emissions estimated to reach a new peak by rising approximately 1% compared to more than 36.8 billion tonnes in 2022 (IEA, 2023; Macnamara, 2023). Specific losses have and will continue to be updated, increasing in scale and scope, extending beyond insects, penguins, dolphins, whales, or corals, which are already quite familiar (Baumhardt, 2023; Chow, 2023; Fretwell, Boutet, & Ratcliffe, 2023; The Associated Press, 2023). For example, a quieter loss, but one that has prompted conservationists to call for urgent conservation efforts, is the Azure Kingfisher, native to Tasmania, Australia (Wallace, 2023). This small, beautiful, and highly skilled fish-catching bird has long inspired many artists, writers, photographers, and children. Yet, today, the Azure Kingfisher faces the threat of extinction. Only 250 to 400 Azure Kingfishers are estimated to be left in the wild. This is one of 14 bird species classified as endangered or critically endangered with no state or national recovery plans. Nevertheless, the Tasmanian Department of Natural Resources and Environment has recently identified this species as “requiring further population and distribution information” (Wallace, 2023).

How odd it can be when Earth provides a living environment for over 8 billion people, but it cannot preserve the population of the tiny Azure Kingfisher, resulting in a decline to only a few hundred individuals. Researchers are right when calling kingfisher species an ecological indicator that is sensitive and vulnerable to environmental changes (Barik, Saha, & Mazumdar, 2022).

Today, many people have realized that the issue lies in how and to what extent humans consume products for their lives in the Anthropocene era. Consumerism has pushed natural resource exploitation to its peak, and the depletion of resources is becoming increasingly prevalent. Even products considered environmentally friendly for the future, such as electric cars (EVs), require sacrificing forests and accepting the biodiversity loss in the terrestrial ecosystems in exchange for nickel production (Ruehl & Dempsey, 2023; Wei, Samuelsson, Tilliander, Gyllenram, & Jönsson, 2020).

Now, the battle against biodiversity loss is spreading to the beauty industry. The beauty and personal care industry has a large market and high profits, especially in the high-income segment. However, this advantage also carries the risk of facing scrutiny, investigations, and

criticism from civil society organizations, environmental activists, and consumers. More than anyone else, the industry is vulnerable to the perils of unfavourable societal assessments, particularly the repercussions of consumer-led boycott actions. The latest and future developments will only increase the pressure on businesses with products related to emissions and environmental damage, specifically biodiversity loss due to deforestation and long-term agricultural cultivation.

Some direct information about the importance of biodiversity conservation for the beauty and personal care industry is clarified in Doolan's report (Doolan, 2023). Ecovia Intelligence, a specialist research, consulting, and training company specializing in global ethical product industries, anticipates a forthcoming surge in the adoption of sustainable regulations and strategies by beauty and personal care firms. One notable facet of this transition involves selecting raw materials that adhere to established environmental ethics criteria. The company also assesses that this shift is no longer a prediction but has become a pressing necessity!

Biodiversity loss associated with cosmetics production businesses primarily arises from sourcing raw materials. Businesses that capitalize on agricultural and wild-harvested ingredients are currently under scrutiny about their capacity to guarantee that these ingredients are ethically sourced. For instance, if a product uses natural raw materials that violate the European Union's forest deforestation regulations (EUDR), that product will be banned or subject to heavy penalties. The compulsory implementation of traceability measures, which enable the identification of the geographical origins and production conditions of commodities, is increasingly prevalent.

Palm oil is an example. This ingredient is used extensively in the cosmetics industry. However, palm oil cultivation is a typical example of deforestation and an agricultural production method that disrupts the ecological balance, disturbs stable carbon reserves, and causes large-scale emissions (Qaim, Sibhatu, Siregar, & Grass, 2020; Vijay, Pimm, Jenkins, & Smith, 2016).

In 2022, 196 countries signed an agreement to prevent and reverse biodiversity loss under the leadership of the United Nations. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework is currently encouraging raw material suppliers to source plant-based materials that comply with environmental ethics and laws, for example, based on UEBT standards (<https://uebt.org/>). However, increasing pressure and legislation trends will gradually occur in countries, making it mandatory.

Given the current circumstances, it is imperative for multinational beauty corporations to take a proactive role in allocating resources towards the development of sustainable agriculture practices. This entails not only advocating for the widespread adoption of environmentally conscious production methods but also dedicating efforts towards conducting research and innovation in the area of nature-friendly manufacturing techniques.

There is a global demand for a substantial proportion of profits to be reinvested into the cultivation of soil fertility, carbon sequestration, and active engagement in a collective effort to safeguard biodiversity within the Earth's ecosystem (Nguyen & Jones, 2022; Vuong, 2021).

Some exemplary commitments can be seen:

- Davines Group (<https://davinesgroup.com/en>; an Italian hair and skincare product company) partnered with the Rodale Institute to establish the European Organic Regenerative Center in Parma in 2021. The company cultivates cosmetic ingredients using regenerative agriculture in a 17-hectare area.
- The multinational L'Occitane Group is committed to producing 100% of raw materials through regenerative and sustainable agriculture by 2025.
- Weleda (<https://www.weleda.com/international>; a pioneering organic skincare company in the world) has established medicinal plant gardens with more than 1,000 different plant species and over 80% of ingredients from plants grown according to organic farming processes.

Although the trend of transitioning from materials of fossil origin (such as oil) to renewable materials, adapting to climate change, and coexisting in harmony with nature has been theoretically determined, execution is still referred to as “a complex ecosystem of challenges” (Doolan, 2023). The main reason is that any change can entail a whole chain of consequences, which can be assessed by the complexity of the current supply chain in the industry.

Despite the numerous obstacles, a consensus on the change in material sources and biodiversity conservation direction is critical since it is a prerequisite for the transparency of raw material origin. Leading brands are increasingly demanded to demonstrate their commitment to the environment and actively provide convincing evidence to consumers of their social responsibility through emission reduction and biodiversity conservation activities.

Humanity has transcended the era in which the wealthy dressed themselves with the pelts of wild animals. Humanity is also leaving behind products that bring ecological destruction, albeit indirectly. Ecological destruction is also the destruction of the living environment of fellow human beings, those who may not have the resources to beautify themselves. Therefore, this type of destructive beauty can also be understood as a source of suffering for fellow human beings, not just in nature.

To quote Karl Marx, as cited in the famous 1987 documentary film “The Story of Kindness” by director Tran Van Thuy (Wilson, 2015):

“Only animals can turn their backs on the suffering of fellow beings and care only for their own fur.”

Certainly, the capitalist owners of beauty brands, as well as consumers, understand this very well.

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