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Ancient Forests under threat

Ancient forests are one of the planet's vital natural resources. Thousands of years old, they are primary and old growth forests found in a variety of climates from temperate to tropical regions of the world. Not only do ancient forests harbour around two-thirds of the world's land-based species of plants and animals,¹ they also regulate critical environmental systems that support life on Earth, such as the climate.

But these magnificent ancient forests are under threat from human activity, such as illegal and destructive logging, clearance for industrial scale agriculture, such as palm oil and soy plantations, and man-made forest fires.

Today, only 20 per cent of the world's original ancient forests remain in large tracts.

Ancient forests harbour around two-thirds of the world's land-based species of plants and animals





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Some of the ancient forests under greatest threat are the 'Paradise Forests'

The Paradise Forests of Asia Pacific

Some of the ancient forests under greatest threat are the 'Paradise Forests'. These stretch from South East Asia, across the islands of Indonesia, on to Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands in the Pacific. This wonderfully diverse region supports hundreds of indigenous cultures and creatures found nowhere else in the world.

The Island of New Guinea, the world's second biggest island, has the largest continuous tracts of ancient forest in the Asia Pacific region. The island is divided into two regions: the Indonesian territory of Papua in the west and the nation of Papua New Guinea in the east.



Intact Forest Landscapes



Other Forest Area*

Malaysia

Singapore

Borneo Island

Indonesia

New Guinea Island

Papua

Papua New Guinea

Solomon Islands

Medan

Kuching

Jakarta

Manokwari

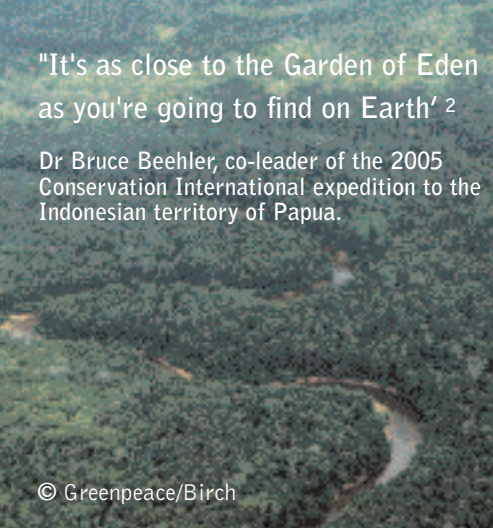
Jayapura

Port Moresby

*This includes both damaged and intact forest areas smaller than 500 km²

"It's as close to the Garden of Eden as you're going to find on Earth' ²

Dr Bruce Beehler, co-leader of the 2005 Conservation International expedition to the Indonesian territory of Papua.



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Few places can match the biodiversity of the Paradise Forests for volume, variety and biological importance

A place in Paradise - rare and endangered forest life

Few places can match the biodiversity of the Paradise Forests for volume, variety and biological importance.

Orang-utans, elephants, tigers, rhinoceros, more than 1,500 species of birds and thousands of plant species are all a part of the natural wonder of Indonesia ³.

The island of New Guinea supports 17,000 species of plants, 233 species of mammals, 650 species of birds and 275 species of reptiles. Half of the animals found on this island are unique to the region ⁴ and those are only the animals that have been identified so far; new species are still being discovered.



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A recent scientific expedition into the Foja Mountains in Papua in December 2005 uncovered a lost world deep in the heart of the Paradise Forests, untouched by humans, with animals never before seen. More than 20 new species of frogs were discovered along with four new types of butterflies, a new species of honeyeater bird, five new species of palm and many other plants yet to be classified, including what may be the world's largest rhododendron flower.⁵

In other parts of the Paradise Forests new animals are also being found. For example, researchers in Borneo recently discovered a new lemur-like mammal.⁶

These new discoveries highlight how vital it is that we prevent the further destruction of unique ancient forest ecosystems.

Researchers in Borneo recently discovered a new lemur-like mammal



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Orang-utans face multiple threats such as habitat loss through logging and hunting

Threatened

This extraordinary biological diversity is critically threatened by destructive and illegal logging.

- In Papua New Guinea, 58 of the 260 known mammal species and 33 of the 720 known bird species are threatened.⁷
- Javan rhinoceros once roamed throughout South East Asia. It is estimated that there are now less than 100.⁸
- Sumatran tigers, the last of the island tigers, are also in danger, numbering just 500 in the wild.⁹
- Orang-utans are unique to the Paradise Forests. One of our closest animal relatives, they face multiple threats, including habitat loss through logging and hunting.



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At the end of 2002, it was estimated only 3,500 Sumatran orang-utans remained and these are in protected areas too small for their long-term survival.¹⁰

- The world's largest butterfly, Queen Alexandra's Birdwing, is found only in lowland forests in a specific area of the northern province of Papua New Guinea. With a wingspan of up to 30 centimetres, this grand insect is on the endangered list as its rainforest habitat is being destroyed. ¹¹
- 38 of the 42 known species of Bird of Paradise (*Paradisea raijanna*) are found on the island of New Guinea. They are Papua New Guinea's national emblem.

38 of the 42 known species of Bird of Paradise (*Paradisea raijanna*) are found on the island of New Guinea



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The Paradise Forests are being destroyed faster than any other on Earth

The problem: Paradise lost?

Ancient forests support life on Earth. Yet, every two seconds, an area of forest the size of a football field is destroyed. The Paradise Forests are being destroyed faster than any other on Earth. Much of the large intact forest landscapes have already been cut down, 72% in Indonesia and 60% in Papua New Guinea.¹² In Indonesia alone, an area of forest at least the size of Wales disappears every year.¹³

When the bulldozers and chainsaws move in, the damage is staggering. In Papua New Guinea, for example, studies show that industrial loggers destroy seventeen trees for every one that is felled and removed.¹⁴



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Don't destroy my forest home

Millions of people live under the canopies of the Paradise Forests. These communities enjoy a relationship with the forests that we cannot even imagine.

The cultural diversity of these communities is astonishing. More than 1000 languages are spoken in New Guinea alone - one sixth of all the languages spoken on Earth.

Illegal and destructive logging has dire consequences for these communities. It destroys their forest home and turns their subsistence lifestyle, supported by the forest for thousands of years, to poverty overnight.

"It has destroyed our river systems. We cannot fish, we cannot drink the water. And it has destroyed our livelihood. Our forest has been our one stop shop and that is not the case today"

John Danaiye, Musula Village clan leader, Western Province, Papua New Guinea.



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Illegal and destructive logging is rife throughout the Paradise Forests

When the loggers come, forest families often suffer violence and abuse.¹⁵ Specific allegations include:

- People forced to sign agreements at gunpoint and threats of imprisonment or even death.¹⁶
- Use of armed police officers with guns drawn to emphasise the ability of the company personnel to enforce their threats.¹⁷
- Use of police 'mobile squads' to quell any industrial unrest amongst logging company employees.¹⁸
- Use of firearms by logging company managers to threaten and intimidate local people.¹⁹
- Torture, physical abuse and unlawful detention of local people by police officers 'employed' by the logging company.²⁰
- Rape of female employees by logging company managers and police.²¹

Plundering paradise: corporations out of control

Illegal and destructive logging is rife throughout the Paradise Forests. One of the greatest challenges is the need to improve law enforcement, including the elimination of corruption and bribery amongst companies and government officials.

Illegal and destructive logging

- In Indonesia it is estimated that 76-80% of all logging is illegal.²²
- Almost all logging in Papua New Guinea is illegal because it is done without the full and informed consent of the customary landowners.
- Logging in the Solomon Islands is controlled by a handful of Asian corporations. These companies have long been criticised and documented as providing little benefit to the country whilst employing destructive practices, including: illegal logging,²³ illegal log exports,²⁴ illegal payments to officials,²⁵ destruction of local water supplies²⁶ and prostitution.²⁷

Although virtually all Papua New Guinea's land is owned by indigenous communities, logging companies are still able to destroy the forest at record rates.

Logging companies have already acquired 70 per cent of Papua New Guinea's available forest resources.²⁸ The government is planning to hand out concessions for most of the remaining accessible forest to logging companies, even though they flout the law.

The most destructive company operating in the area is Malaysian logging giant, Rimbunan Hijau, responsible for nearly half of all logs that leave the country.²⁹

In its insatiable drive to profit from destroying the forest, Rimbunan Hijau continues to break the law. It fraudulently acquires concessions to log forest areas, breaches environmental

regulations and commits human rights abuses.³⁰

Yet the company appears to be protected by political patronage and its forest crimes go unchecked.

An Ombudsman Commission investigating the illegal extension of the Wawoi Guavi logging concession in Papua New Guinea awarded to a Rimbunan Hijau owned company, accused consecutive Forest Ministers of being involved in serious misconduct.³¹

High ranking politicians are accused of acquiring logging concessions with total disregard of the law and the customary landowners.³²



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Much of the illegal timber from the island of New Guinea goes to China and Japan

Is your wood illegal?

Your bookshelves, your floor, photocopy paper and even the cheap plywood at your local construction site could have come from the Paradise Forests. Much of the illegal timber from the island of New Guinea goes to China and Japan to be turned into plywood, furniture and flooring, which is sold on to European, US and Australian markets - where its true origins are rarely questioned.

The trade in illegal and destructive timber thrives because consumers rarely ask where their timber comes from. Meanwhile, governments worldwide are failing to regulate this illegal and destructive trade, or ensure that imported timber is both legal and credibly certified to be from a truly sustainable source.



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What is 'illegal logging'?

Logging is illegal when the timber is harvested, processed, transported, brought or sold in violation of national laws. Laws can be violated at many different stages of the supply chain such as:

- Obtaining logging concessions illegally (e.g. via corruption and bribery, or without lawful consent).
- Violating export bans.
- Cutting protected tree species or extracting them from a protected area.
- Taking out more trees than permitted, cutting down under sized or oversized trees, or logging outside a permitted area.
- Fraudulent declaration to customs of the amount or nature of timber present.
- Use of fraudulent documents to smuggle timber internationally.



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Local landowners have invited Greenpeace to help forge these lasting solutions that will return the forest to its people

The solution: taking back the forest

Amongst the destruction, there is a new hope in parts of the Paradise Forests. Greenpeace is working with communities to take back their land and to create a viable living from ecologically sustainable solutions. In some areas, local landowners have invited Greenpeace to help forge these lasting solutions that will return the forest to its people.

For more than a decade, Greenpeace has been working with customary landowners and local non-government organisations to protect the Paradise Forests. This initiative has helped close down corrupt forestry activities and set up community-operated alternatives, such as eco-forestry, in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

In 2003, Greenpeace and its partners helped customary landowners throw Concord Pacific (controlled by Datuk Yaw of Samling), a Malaysian company involved in illegal logging,³³ off their land around Lake Murray, western Papua New Guinea.

They are now supporting the communities' efforts to move towards eco-forestry and to hold the company to account for the damage it caused. The company is facing charges in the Papua New Guinea court for trespassing during its illegal logging activities.

Greenpeace is starting a new project in Papua, a province of Indonesia, to set the stage for eco-enterprises and is stepping up its work with communities in Papua New Guinea. Together, these new initiatives will help protect what is left of the largest intact, pristine region of the Paradise Forests, a prime target for the logging industry to exploit.

Community land use planning, boundary marking and mapping are setting the stage for alternative 'eco' enterprises and protection from logging.

Boundary marking to protect the forests

The land rights of indigenous communities in Papua New Guinea were never questioned until logging companies took an interest in the value of the forest. The constitution itself recognises that 97% of the land belongs to indigenous communities.

Yet, with the arrival of the logging companies, a scramble for forest resources has ensued and customary landowners are now having to act fast to protect their land, the forest and the life it supports.

Boundary marking is a key tool in helping communities take back control of their land, their lives and their future because it prevents the government trading their land rights away to the loggers.

What is boundary marking?

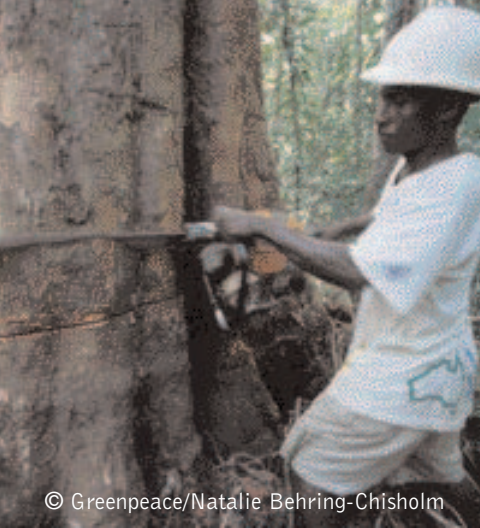
Boundary marking is both a physical process in which territorial borders are identified and marked and a social process involving negotiations over where a tribe's boundaries lie. For the first time, tribal chiefs in Papua New Guinea are coming together to formally agree where the borders of their respective lands lie.

The process involves a boundary marking team walking the edges of the territories with the customary landowners. The team takes readings from a Global Positioning System (GPS) and at the same time, the boundaries are physically marked with tags and a line or path is cut through the forest. Once the path is completed, the GPS co-ordinates are plotted and a boundary map created.



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Boundary marking is both a physical process in which territorial borders are identified and marked and a social process involving negotiations over where a tribe's boundaries lie



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Alternatives to industrial logging

“Ecoforestry is much better than logging. I prefer ecoforestry because we keep control of our forests and it does not spoil our sea, land, rivers and water catchment.”

Redol Gebe, project manager of the Lobi Ecoforestry project in the Solomon Islands.

Eco-forestry is an alternative to industrial logging. Using minimal impact harvesting methods, landowners fell small number of carefully selected trees, process and transport the timber without damaging the surrounding forest. This beautiful eco-timber is sold to overseas markets, providing local people with independence, an income and employment while protecting their forest resources for the future. Greenpeace estimates that 'eco' timber provides up to ten times more profit to local communities than large scale logging operations.

Other options for income generating activities include ecotourism and the manufacture of non-timber forest products such as tapa cloths, bilum bags and nuts.

These sustainable alternatives can only exist if the forest is preserved.

What can be done to save the Paradise Forests?

The Paradise Forests, along with the Earth's other last ancient forests, are vital to us all. Yet they are cut down to make cheap plywood for construction sites in developed countries, to produce pulp for toilet paper, flooring, disposable chopsticks and furniture. They are also destroyed to clear land for crops like soy beans and palm oil.

Greenpeace is demanding governments act now to protect these forests by:

- Setting up a global network of protected forest areas;
- Banning the import of illegal timber and timber products and promoting socially and ecologically responsible forest management worldwide;
- Supporting efforts by countries that produce timber to combat corruption and to strengthen law enforcement.



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You can also help protect ancient forests:

- Pressure your government. Demand they stop allowing forest destruction. Call on them to protect the last remaining ancient forests and introduce legislation that stops imports of illegally and destructively sourced timber into your country.
- Only buy "good wood" - Greenpeace supports the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), a scheme that ensures timber is from responsibly managed forests and plantations.
- Buy only ancient forest friendly paper products. Ancient forest papers are those that maximise post consumer recycled content with any virgin fibre coming from forest stewardship council stewardship council (FSC).
- Log on to www.greenpeace.org to find out how you can support Greenpeace in its work to protect the world's remaining ancient forests.





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What is FSC?



When you buy a timber product carrying the logo of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), you can be sure it comes from an environmentally appropriate and socially beneficial source. FSC is the only, internationally recognised, forest certification scheme that can give rigorous and credible assurance that timber products come from legal and responsibly managed forests. It is also the only scheme supported by major environmental groups as well as progressive timber companies and many indigenous people's organisations.

Thank you for reading this information. Ancient forests support all life on Earth. They need our help. Together, we can save them.

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