

**BirdLife Global Forest Conservation Programme**

# **The Harapan Rainforest Initiative, Sumatra**

**An innovative partnership for the conservation and  
restoration of the most threatened and valuable  
rainforests in Indonesia**

**The First Forest Ecosystem Restoration concession  
licensed by the Indonesian Government to the BirdLife  
NGO alliance (100,000 hectares for 100 years)**



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## **Summary**

### **The urgent need for forest conservation in Sumatra**

Moist tropical rainforests are the most diverse ecosystems on Earth, and Indonesia hosts some of the most extensive and biologically-diverse tropical forests in the world. The lowland rainforests of Sumatra are of particular importance, and rival the Amazon in terms of species diversity. Sumatra's lowland forests are, however, threatened with almost complete clearance, as a result of timber extraction and conversion for oil palm and pulp-wood plantations. These forests occupied around 16 million ha in 1900, but were reduced to 2.2 million ha by 1997. Only 300,000 ha of lowland rainforest may now remain. This transformation is driving endangered and charismatic species such as the Orang-utan, Sumatran Tiger and Sumatran Rhino towards extinction.



The Endangered Sumatran Tiger

The clearance and degradation of tropical forests in Sumatra is having an impact on the people of Indonesia and more widely in the region. The degradation of watersheds has led to serious flooding and land-slides in Sumatra in recent years, resulting in widespread destruction and loss of life. Forest-dwelling communities, heavily dependent on the rainforest for food and materials, have also been seriously affected. Smoky haze, resulting from forest clearance activities, now annually blankets the island and neighbouring countries, with an impact on human health, quality of life, tourism and transport throughout the region. This issue has been

addressed at the highest of levels in ASEAN resulting in the Regional Haze Action Plan (RHAP).

Of global concern is the contribution that forest clearance and burning is making to climate change. It is estimated that 20% of all global greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation and forest fires, and as a consequence, Indonesia currently ranks third globally in terms of carbon dioxide emissions. It is increasingly recognised that avoiding deforestation represents one of the most cost effective ways of reducing global carbon emissions, and restoring tropical forests is one of the best approaches to carbon sequestration.

### **The Harapan Rainforest**

In response to these concerns, the BirdLife International Partnership has embarked upon the innovative Harapan Rainforest Initiative, with a view to acquiring and managing a large forest concession in Sumatra. BirdLife Partners own or manage land across the world, covering over 1 million ha, and this was felt to be the only approach that would work given the threats and challenges confronting lowland forests in the region. The Harapan Rainforest site was selected following a comprehensive analysis of remaining rainforest in Sumatra, and has taken into account biological importance, forest extent and quality, management feasibility, current land-use, and the degree of threat.



Location of Harapan Rainforest

As a result of this assessment, an extensive forest block on the border of Jambi and South Sumatra provinces emerged as the top priority for conservation and this was subject to a detailed feasibility study and risk assessment. This reviewed district and provincial land-use and infrastructure development plans, as well as logging and mineral exploration concessions. Whilst threats to the area and risks to the project were identified, these are considered to be manageable providing a legal framework and management structures can be put in place. Without the intervention of BirdLife this forest was doomed to certain and imminent destruction through legal and illegal logging and conversion to oil palm/timber plantations.

The feasibility study revealed the need to seek changes to the Indonesian forestry law in order for it to be possible to manage a logging concession for forest conservation and restoration (rather than timber extraction) purposes. The initiative has been successful in persuading the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry to issue an enabling ministerial decree and new forest law on forest ecosystem restoration, and to legally reclassify the status of the Harapan Rainforest site from two logging concessions to a single forest restoration concession.

### Description of the Harapan Rainforest



Aerial view of the Harapan Rainforest

The forest restoration concession covers just over 100,000 ha (almost twice the size of Singapore) of mainly secondary rainforest, with some primary patches remaining. It is situated about two hours by road from the provincial capital, Jambi. The forest is on flat to undulating land, mostly below 100 m, rising to around 140 m at the western border. There are occasional small, slow-flowing rivers, and forest pools. It is one of the most extensive tracts of lowland forest left in Sumatra. The area is used by a small community of forest-dependent people, the *Batin Sembilan*, and the establishment of the Harapan Rainforest Initiative provides them with the option of continuing to reside in a forest environment.

The area supports a wide variety of wildlife, including 235 bird species, seven cat species and five primates, Asian Elephant and Tapir, and most notably up to 20 Endangered Sumatran Tigers. Following reclassification of the area, a BirdLife International consortium (comprising Burung Indonesia, BirdLife International and the UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) bid for and won the government tender to manage this area as a forest restoration concession in December 2006 (with the 100-year license signed by the Minister of Forestry in August 2007). An Indonesian foundation and logging company, owned and controlled by the BirdLife consortium, have been set up to manage the area.

## The “ Forest of Hope”

Harapan means “hope” in the Indonesian language. “Hope Forest” is intended to demonstrate a new approach to tropical forest conservation in Indonesia and globally. The vision of the Harapan Rainforest Initiative is to halt deforestation and allow forest regeneration for the benefit of people and biodiversity. The BirdLife consortium will prevent forest fires, illegal logging and forest degradation and will involve local communities in sustainable forest management. It will also protect endangered species, conduct scientific research, and establish ecotourism and education facilities and programmes. Forest restoration will be addressed through natural and assisted regeneration, with replanting of indigenous species in selected areas. To manage the area, a Reserve Headquarters and guard stations have already been established, with plans to quickly recruit scientific, communications and community development staff. Over 50 forest guards have been employed wherever possible sourced from local communities. Outreach activities will be undertaken to win-over local stakeholders in support of forest conservation.

## National and international collaboration and support



BirdLife forest guards are now in position at Harapan

The Harapan Initiative brings together several BirdLife International Partners, primarily Burung Indonesia and the UK’s Royal Society with the co-ordination and support of the BirdLife International Secretariat. Other BirdLife organisations supporting the initiative are The Nature Society (Singapore), Natuurpunt and Natagora (Belgium), SVS (Switzerland) and Vogelbescherming (Netherlands). These organisations, all registered charities, have common charitable objectives, to conserve biodiversity and habitats for people and for the well-being of the global environment.

They bring together a complementary set of skills and capabilities which have proved instrumental to the success of the Initiative. The involvement of these national ngos also represents an opportunity to involve civil society in their respective countries, raising awareness about the initiative and the overall issue of tropical deforestation. To this we should add the worldwide promotion of the initiative through BirdLife International Secretariat and the BirdLife network of ngos in over 100 countries.

The initiative has benefited throughout from the support and commitment provided by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry. Its significance and innovative nature have also been recognised by the European Union and the UK Government’s Darwin Initiative, resulting in substantial financial support for the start up of conservation, community development and research activities.

## **The role of Harapan to combat haze and global warming**

Tropical forests store twice as much carbon as temperate forests, and their conservation is now more than ever viewed as central to global efforts to combat climate change. Through deforestation and forest fires huge volumes of carbon dioxide are emitted in the atmosphere. It is estimated that 20% of all global carbon dioxide emissions come from deforestation and forest fires, and as a consequence, Indonesia currently ranks third in terms of carbon dioxide emissions (after the United States and China) because of forest burning. In addition to the carbon stock which will be released in the likely case of forest clearance and conversion to plantations, Harapan Rainforest is continuously absorbing carbon as it regenerates. Estimates of the carbon stocks and sequestration value of the Harapan Rainforest are being currently calculated.

The resulting smoky haze from forest fires in Sumatra annually blankets the island and neighbouring countries, with a negative impact on human health, quality of life, tourism and transport throughout the region. This issue has been addressed at the highest of levels in ASEAN resulting in the Regional Haze Action Plan (RHAP). The Harapan Rainforest initiative contributes directly to all three RHAP priority objectives: prevention of land and forest fires through better management policies and enforcement; establishing operational mechanisms for monitoring; and strengthening regional land and forest fire-fighting capability. As a contribution towards the implementation of this action plan, Singapore is the lead country for monitoring of fires and haze, and specifically has agreed to help Jambi Province in Sumatra tackle the problem of forest fires.

## **Proposal for collaboration**

The Harapan Initiative has been carefully planned and designed over a five-year period and has already achieved major policy results. A director, administrator, and the first contingent of forest guards have been recently established on the ground. Having finalised the governance, legal mechanisms, management structure and financial strategy, BirdLife is seeking support to provide financial sustainability to the initiative.

We suggest two ways in which the donor might support the Harapan Rainforest Initiative. First is to support the Harapan Rainforest Fund, which is being set up to cover the essential conservation, restoration and management costs of the area in perpetuity. To date, US \$ 5 million has been raised, based on donations and pledges, and we have set a minimum target of US \$ 30 million and a deadline of June 2009 for capitalising the Fund. A contribution to the Harapan Rainforest Fund offers an association with the Harapan Initiative at the highest level and in perpetuity.

Secondly, a donor can also consider supporting the management of the Harapan rainforest and specific activities focused to protect the forest, avoid illegal logging, prevent forest fires and facilitate natural regeneration of the rainforest but also education and research centers, as well as social development projects for the local communities.

The size of the forest, its stunning biodiversity value, the nature of this unprecedented and innovative initiative, and the contribution it can make towards combating climate change and regional haze, combine to make this a top class conservation initiative of global significance.