How BirdLife is conserving tropical forests - with Roger Safford

Title

I work in the Conservation Department, a small team whose job it is to coordinate, manage and support global conservation programmes of the BirdLife Partnership. I?ve been at BirdLife for ten years, working on a mixture of projects mainly focussed in the forests and wetlands of the tropics. In Papua New Guinea, I was privileged to work in a lowland rainforest. One could fly over in a light plane and see nothing but forest in all directions. It is daunting to think that one could do the same thing in Sumatra only 20 years ago, yet only a few thousand square kilometres of lowland rainforest remain there now. Tropical forests are disappearing at a rate of one football pitch every four seconds - more than 7 million hectares per year. These losses are driven by global demand for timber, paper and land for food crops and bio-fuels. BirdLife's work has shown that 913 species worldwide are threatened by forest destruction and degradation; that's almost one in ten of the world's birds.

Roger Safford

Now is the time to stop it, and to begin to repair the damage we have done. BirdLife, through the unique structure of the Partnership, has a major role to play, not only in showing how to do it on the ground, but in linking these efforts to national and global policy-making, so that successes are replicated and multiplied. Forests are far more than just stores of biodiversity. Carbon emissions caused by deforestation and forest degradation are greater than those of all the cars, trucks, planes, ships and trains worldwide, and more than four billion people depend partly or wholly on water supplies maintained by forests. BirdLife's forest work is also helping to promote respect and support for the rights of local and indigenous peoples. We have to find ways to ensure that the costs as well as the benefits of conserving forests are shared fairly. We need to find new ways to conserve large areas of forest, using every legal, governance and long-term financing tool at our disposal. If models and tools do not exist, we must help to create them. One striking success is in Sumatra, where a consortium of the BirdLife Partners Burung Indonesia and RSPB with the BirdLife Secretariat is working in the 101,000 ha Harapan Rainforest. This has resulted in a completely new type of forest management licence being created by Indonesia?s Ministry of Forestry, specifically for forest restoration. Millions of hectares of forests that could otherwise have been lost are being considered for restoration licences, and this figure is still increasing. Throughout the Partnership, BirdLife is striving to increase its effectiveness in promoting and implementing forest conservation. This is why BirdLife launched the *Forests of Hope* programme, which began with Harapan. Another *Forests of Hope* site is Western Siem Pang. This is one of the last areas of the dry and semi-evergreen forests of mainland South-East Asia, where one can find five Critically Endangered species. The site is threatened by concessions that could see most of it converted to biofuel or rubber plantations. Support is urgently needed for our work on the ground at Western Siem Pang, and our advocacy at national level in Cambodia. This article is from BirdLife's Rare Bird Club newsletter. To find out more, please click the logo below.

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