

Forum: Sustainable Development Commission
Issue: Finding measures to protect endangered species in rainforests
Chair: Alexandra Bouros, Kolding Gymnasium, Denmark
Contact: bb_alex99@yahoo.com or susdev@munoh.de

Description of the issue:

A well-known estimate is that over half of the species of animals discovered on earth are found in the rainforests. The number of species is astonishing and could go as high as 50 million.

However, species are now going extinct far faster than they used to. Studies conducted in 2015 estimated that the extinction rate has increased a hundredfold over the last century, making the extinction rates 1,000 times higher than the “background” extinction rates. The current rate of extinction is so great, that many species go extinct before they have even been discovered. Many of the species in the rain forests are endangered, the main cause being that their habitat, the rain forest, is itself threatened.

Background information:

Accelerated rates of extinction of the species and their endangerment have marked the last two centuries, alongside rapid growth in human populations and a massive industrial progress. Natural extinction of species is a natural phenomenon, taking place continuously “in the background” of history – however, scientists say that Earth is in on the brink of its sixth mass extinctions of animals, and plants alike. ¹

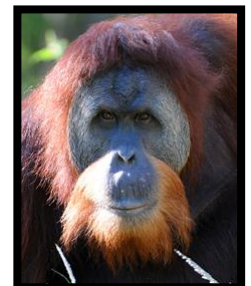
Unlike the past five mass extinctions, which were caused by natural climate shifts, asteroid strikes and volcanic eruptions, the current crisis is caused by humans. Ninety-nine percent of the currently threatened species are at risk because of human activities, such as driving habitat loss, poaching, introducing new species and global warming. As the rate of change in our biosphere is increasing, and every specie’s extinction eventually leads to the extinction of other species bound to it in a complicated ecological web, the extinctions numbers are going to rise in the coming decades, as the ecosystems of the world fall apart. ²

The main habitats for tropical animals are the rainforests, which cover approximately two percent of the globe. Even so, they contain over fifty percent of all life on earth, with the largest rainforest situated in the Amazon river basin in South America, much of which lies in Brazil, Indonesia and the Congo Basin in Africa. Sadly, human demands are constantly laid on rainforests by various parties, which results in habitat loss. The biotic integrity, or the ecosystem health, diminish native species and highly simplify the system and its habitats. Roughly speaking, when 90% of the habitat is eliminated, 50% of its species will be lost.³

Most of the endangered animals are found in the rainforests. That is because rainforest countries are the richest countries in biodiversity in the world. However, they are mostly developing countries, meaning that the treatment of natural resources is determined more by immediate economic demands of their populations than by wildlife conservation imperatives.⁴

It is an impossible task to list all of the endangered rainforest species. Rather than doing that, only some of the better known species will be presented here.⁵ A better resource would be the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species, a list which contains over 15,500 species worldwide in every habitat that face extinction, and grows daily.

- **Gorillas** - Endangered to Critically Endangered (depending on the subspecies). They live in Tropical and subtropical forests in Central Africa, and are threatened by loss of habitat and hunting.
- **Golden Lion Tamarin** – Endangered, with only 800 specimen left in the wild. They were once plentiful in Brazil, but now almost extinct. This is primarily due to hunting. A high price is paid for its fur on the black market.
- **Sumatran Tiger** - Critically Endangered, with only 400-500 specimen left in the wild. It is the only surviving species of Indonesian tiger. One of the most actual threats to their survival comes from the destruction of their habitats by the pulp and paper industry, as it converts high value rainforests into monoculture pulp plantations.
- **Orangutans** – Sumatran (Critically endangered) and Bornean (Endangered) – They are the world's largest tree-climbing mammals. Nevertheless, their forest habitat in Indonesia and Malaysia is rapidly disappearing, putting the future of Asia's only great ape in peril.



From left to right: Gorilla, Golden Lion Tamarin, Sumatran Tiger and Sumatran Orangutan

Good to know:

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species – a list introduced in 1963, its purpose being to highlight species threatened with extinction, and thereby promote their conservation. The list serves as a guide and determines the level of danger an animal community is under.

Regulations relevant to the protection of endangered species in the rainforests:

Many regulations instituted in the 1960's and 70's now protect endangered species of animals.

Primary protection comes from the 1973 CITES Convention On International Trade In Endangered Wild Flora And Fauna treaty, which was signed by over 120 countries.⁶

Key terms:

Ecosystem: It contains all of the living things (plants, animals and organisms) in a particular area, which interact with each other, and with their non-living environments (weather, sun, climate, atmosphere, earth etc.).⁷

Biodiversity: The term refers to the variety of life. It is seen in the number of species in an ecosystem or on the entire Earth. Biodiversity is also used to measure the health of biological systems, and to see if there is any danger that a certain species can become extinct.⁸

Endangered species: Species that are under the threat of extinction. When an animal or species is called endangered, they are either disappearing fast from the face of the planet or are very sparsely populated, which is not good enough for the survival of the animal community in the long run.

Threatened Species: Species that are likely to become endangered in the near future.

Useful Sources:

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

<http://rainforests.mongabay.com/1001.htm>

<http://www.endangeredspeciesinternational.org/index.php>

<http://www.tropical-rainforest-animals.com/>

Expectations for Position Papers:

All delegates should prepare their assigned nations' view on the topic 'Finding measures to protect endangered species in rainforests', as well as the three other topics for the Sustainable Development Committee. You should research further on the topic, as this Research Report is provided by the Chairs only for presenting an overview of the issue. To help you get started, I have written some questions which might inspire you and be helpful during the debate. Some of the questions may not be relevant for all nations, however, we suggest that you answer as many questions as possible and as thoroughly as you can.

What is your country's position on rainforests? Does it have any rainforests?

What measures has your nation taken in order to protect the endangered species in the rainforests, or the rainforests themselves?

How can threats to the endangered species in the rainforests be avoided or countered, according to your nation?

How can the current situation be improved, according to your country?

Which international obligations (relevant to endangered species in the rainforests protection) has your nation ratified?

Used sources:

- ¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/radical-conservation/2015/oct/20/the-four-horsemen-of-the-sixth-mass-extinction>
- ² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/06/22/the-earth-is-on-the-brink-of-a-sixth-mass-extinction-scientists-say-and-its-humans-fault/>
- ³ <http://www.tropical-rainforest-animals.com/Animal-Extinction.html>
- ⁴ <http://www.tropical-rainforest-animals.com/Endangered-Animals.html#iucn>
- ⁵ [http://wwf.panda.org/what we do/endangered species/](http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/)
- ⁶ <https://www.cites.org/eng/disc/text.php>
- ⁷ <https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecosystem>
- ⁸ [http://www.wwf.org.au/our work/saving the natural world/what is biodiversity/](http://www.wwf.org.au/our_work/saving_the_natural_world/what_is_biodiversity/)

Images sources:

- http://dingo.care2.com/pictures/petition_images/petition/492/135562-1417076391-wide.jpg
- http://gdb.voanews.com/E52F1A97-C318-4CB2-A2F5-F4882C6E39D1_mw1024_s_n.jpg
- [http://assets.worldwildlife.org/photos/1635/images/story_full_width/Sumatran Tiger 8.10.2012 Why They Matter HI 204421.jpg?1345599574](http://assets.worldwildlife.org/photos/1635/images/story_full_width/Sumatran_Tiger_8.10.2012_Why_They_Matter_HI_204421.jpg?1345599574)
- <http://www.funzoomiami.org/resources/animals/detail/sumatran-orangutan.jpg>