TROPICAL FOREST BY COCOS BOUNTY/SHUTTERSTOCK

A Planet on the Edge

RAINFOREST TRUST®

Volume XVIII | Summer 2022

Rainforest Trust saves endangered wildlife and protects our planet by creating rainforest reserves through partnerships, community engagement and donor support.

Transparent, Efficient, Effective

Rainforest Trust is committed to the highest level of transparency and responsible stewardship in all that we do. Over 94% of all donations go to our direct conservation action protecting rainforests and benefiting endangered species, Indigenous Peoples and neighboring communities, and the planet.

Thanks to the generous support of our Board and others who cover our exceptionally low operating expenses, we are able to allocate 100% of your donation to conservation action.

Since 2014, independent charity evaluator Charity Navigator has awarded Rainforest Trust its highest possible rating of 4 stars for "Exceptional" performance and accountability, and we have been awarded the 2021 Platinum Seal of Transparency from GuideStar.

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The True Value of Biodiversity

Last November, at the world's most important climate change conference, something unique happened. These meetings, which bring together world leaders to address the threats of climate change, have typically given little time to biodiversity. At COP26, biodiversity was placed front and center on several occasions, perhaps most significantly when over 100 nations pledged to end global deforestation by 2030. The nations and the financial institutions of our world are waking up to the fact that we must conserve biodiversity if we stand any chance of mitigating the impacts of climate change.

The close link between species, habitats and climate change, which we explore in this newsletter, is now well publicized. Our collective response must be proportionate to the threats and orchestrated efficiently and effectively. Our planet is on a razor's edge of irreversible instability. Now is not the time to be slowing down, reducing efforts and losing focus.

This year we must, and we are, scaling up our efforts across the tropics, focusing on some of the most biodiverse and carbon-rich habitats in the world. We will rely on your support to give us the flexibility and ready funding to act quickly to save the most biodiverse landscapes in the world that have been storing carbon for millenia.

Biodiversity conservation has always been at the heart of our work. To many of us, the inherent value of a species is justification enough to try to save it. But that value alone has not been enough to save cherished species from extinction. With your support, we have protected almost 40 million acres. **Our goal is to protect at least 125 million acres by 2025, saving half the world's most threatened birds and mammals, and mitigating the impacts of climate change in significant ways.**

We're supporting our partners by working with governments and civil society organizations to end deforestation and protect at least 30% of the world's land and seas by 2030. And we support Indigenous peoples and local communities to protect their lands from the myriad threats that not only impact their way of life but also our global community.

We can hope that COP26 was a turning point, one at which the true value of biodiversity is considered and efforts to conserve species are scaled up. Until then, Rainforest Trust, our partners across the globe and you will continue to play a critical part in protecting species and our planet one place at a time.

– James Lewis, Vice President of Conservation

TOP: AFRICAN FOREST ELEPHANT BY SERGEY URYADNIKOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

Rainforest Climate Action Fund (RCAF) Impact Facts

2,259,969 acres

$2,327,744 funding

374,575,213 mT of CO_2 equivalents stored

or

The CO_2 equivalent to **80,709,434** passenger vehicles driven for one year

BORNEO PEAT SWAMP FOREST BY ECOPIX/SHUTTERSTOCK

For Peat's Sake

At first glance, a peat swamp may not win you over. "Beauty is more than skin deep" rings true for these boggy forests. But now that we understand the hidden value of what lies beneath it—and a peat swamp's vital role—its function far outweighs its looks.

Muddy swamps and other peatlands make up just 3% of Earth's surface but store twice as much carbon as all the world's forests combined—90% of it underground.

Organic matter—branches, roots, leaves, tree trunks, and sphagnum moss—accumulates in layers so wet they can't decompose, retaining carbon within them. Each trapped layer presses those beneath into a thick, muddy blanket that forms acidic peat. This sealed, underground carbon vault is the key to life on Earth. However, its value is only maintained if these areas remain undisturbed.

It takes 1,000 years for a one-meter-deep layer of peat to form, but only a generation for humans to destroy it. In Southeast Asia, the total area of peatlands is estimated at 56 million acres, which is approximately 40% of the world's known tropical peatlands.

In 2017, a massive tropical peatland was identified beneath the forests in Africa's Congo Basin. Called the Cuvette Centrale, this peatland covers nearly 36 million acres in northern Republic of the Congo and Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2019, Rainforest Trust helped establish the Ekolo ya Bonobo Community Reserve, protecting 117,412 acres. A current expansion of 80,000 acres will bring the total protected area to 197,412 acres. This vital peat swamp habitat is home to one of the Congo's most threatened species, the Endangered Bonobo.

Protecting these irreplaceable peatlands found in Southeast Asia, Africa's Congo Basin and around the world is critical to maintaining the Earth's balance. Only by safeguarding peatlands can we enable the delicate dance between climate, habitat and species to continue for generations to come.

TOP: YOUTH BONOBO BY SERGEY URYADNIKOV/SHUTTERSTOCK; **RIGHT:** PEAT SWAMP, CENTRAL BORNEO BY YESTERNIGHT SUPPLY/SHUTTERSTOCK

Smart Carbon Storage Saves Species

A few decades ago, most of us would never have guessed that "carbon storage" and "sequestration" would become household words, or that carbon emissions, deforestation and the extinction of our most beloved species would be linked in inextricable ways.

Carbon is stored in living and dead biomass and soil. Soil wins out, storing almost twice as much carbon as the atmosphere, plant life and animal life combined. Of the 3,860 gigatons[1] of carbon stored on Earth, wetlands, tropical forests and tropical savannas store almost one-quarter. On the flip side, 10% of global carbon emissions are caused by tropical deforestation.

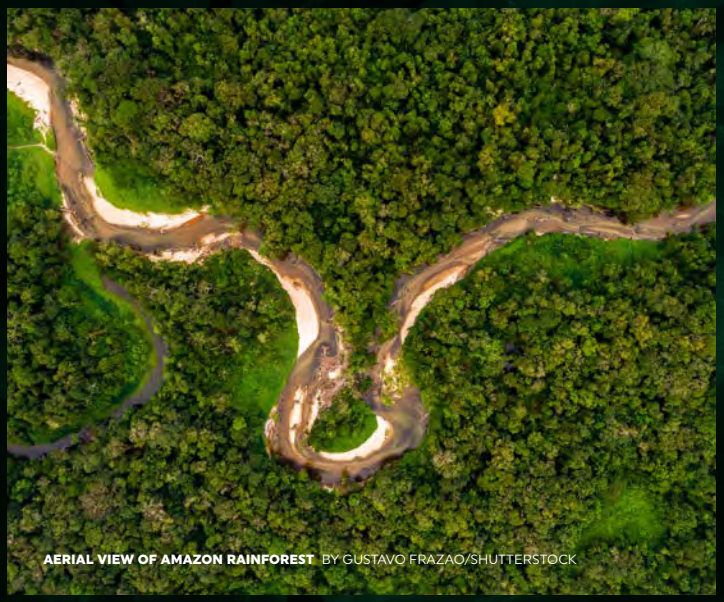
Carbon is sequestered, or pulled from the air, by most healthy ecosystems. Collectively, the world's forests absorb a net 7.6 billion metric tonnes of CO_2 per year, and tropical forests sequester more carbon per year than temperate or boreal forests. Coastal ecosystems like mangroves are especially important for climate mitigation because they have very high carbon sequestration rates—2.5 metric tons of CO_2 per acre per year, on average, for mangroves—and also because they are waterlogged. Water prevents organic matter from fully decaying and releasing the carbon back into the air, making these systems highly effective for both sequestration and long-term carbon storage.

Carbon sequestration and storage are key to solving the climate crisis. When deforestation occurs, an average of 245 metric tons of CO_2 per acre is immediately emitted. Fires, deforestation, and forest degradation emit carbon at different rates, but it all adds up to species extinction and climate disruption.

Rainforest Trust uses the world's best scientific methods to identify the most critical habitats for conservation. Carbon is not the only thing we consider when protecting landscapes, of course, but it is becoming increasingly important to our decision-making process as climate change accelerates and disrupts the habitats and habits of millions of species.

True to our mission, at least one-third of Rainforest Trust projects target high-density carbon landscapes that are important in fighting climate change—like peat swamps, coastal mangrove forests, and high-elevation páramo—*and* protect abundant biodiversity at the same time. We focus on opportunities that multiply our impact for climate, species and human communities.

Protected areas created with Rainforest Trust are storing 5.7 billion metric tons of CO_2 equivalents—an amount a bit more than the entire net annual CO_2 production of the United States.



AERIAL VIEW OF AMAZON RAINFOREST BY GUSTAVO FRAZAO/SHUTTERSTOCK

BACKGROUND: MANGROVE FOREST ROOTS BY NATTAPON PONBUMRUNGWONG/SHUTTERSTOCK

[1] 1 gigaton is equal to 1 billion metric tons

High-Density Carbon Landscapes in the Tropics and Subtropics

What is Vulnerable Carbon?

While vast amounts of carbon are stored in biomass and soil, not all of that carbon is lost when natural ecosystems are converted to agriculture, pasture or even urban landscapes. It is important to isolate this "vulnerable carbon" so that we can more accurately estimate the amount of carbon we are helping to keep in the ground through the creation of protected areas.

When land is converted for human use, all of the biomass carbon—but only some of the soil carbon—is released into the atmosphere. For example, only 26% (on average) of the top 12 inches of soil carbon is released when forests and grasslands are converted to agriculture; the rest stays in the ground. However, in waterlogged systems like peat and mangroves, carbon is both denser and more vulnerable: an estimated 80-90% of the top 3 ¼ feet of carbon is released when mangroves are converted to shrimp ponds or peatland is converted to agriculture. By pinpointing vulnerable carbon in our measurements, we can more precisely estimate our impact when mitigating climate change.

*The concept and science behind vulnerable carbon was originally described in Goldstein et al. 2020: Protecting irrecoverable carbon in Earth's ecosystems, *Nature Climate Change*.

The Butterflies of Mt. Mabu

While it was well known locally, it wasn't until 2005 that Julian Bayliss, a conservation scientist, found an undisturbed rainforest within the cratered mountain top of Mozambique's Mt. Mabu using Google Earth. A treasure trove of butterflies—and many other new-to-science species—were found living here in this hidden forest.

Rising 5,500 feet into the sky, sacred Mabu Forest is also known as the butterfly forest. Groups of butterflies, called a kaleidoscope, follow rivers upstream every October and November to the summit of Mt. Mabu, where their life-affirming courtship rituals take place. **At least six endemic butterfly species, as well as an estimated 250 more butterfly species, take part in this rare phenomenon known as butterfly "hill-topping."**

Various expeditions have found many new-to-science endemic species of butterflies, including *Cymothoe baylissi poppyana*. This species, found by Bayliss, was named after his daughter, Poppy. Butterflies in the *Cymothoe* genus characteristically spend most of their time in the canopy but also seek out sunny spots between the trees and feed on decaying vegetation on the forest floor.

Another endemic species, *Epamera malaikae*, a genus of butterflies in the Lycaenidae family, was collected close to the summit on Mt. Mabu over a series of expeditions. Lycaenidae is the second-largest family of butterflies, with over 6,000 species worldwide. Members of this family are also called gossamer-winged butterflies. They belong in the "pollux" group, associated with montane forests.

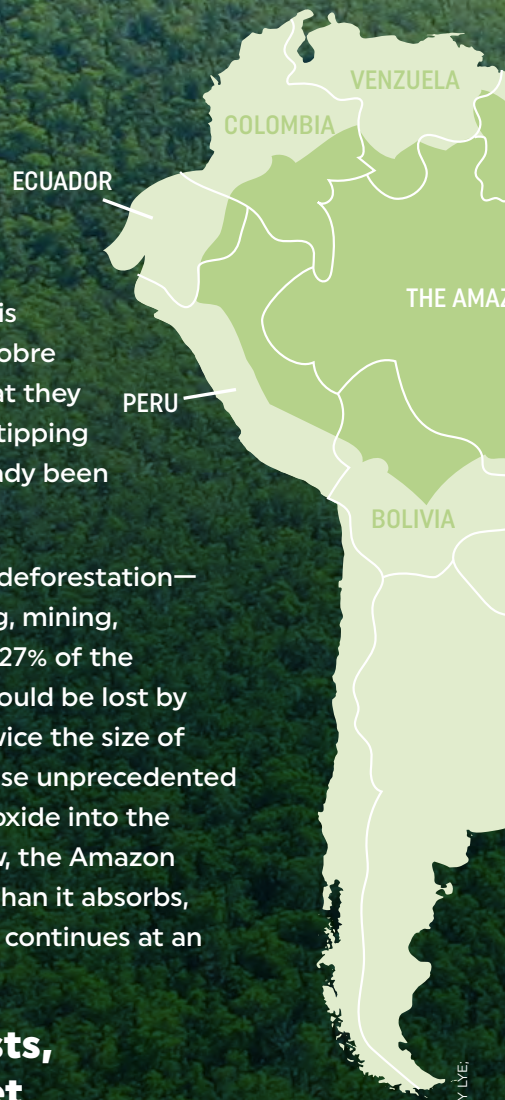
Other endemic butterfly species that have been found include *Neptis collinsi* and *Papilio pelodurus allani*.

Believed to be the largest medium-altitude rainforest in southern Africa, Mt. Mabu is threatened by mining and logging encroaching on Mabu Forest's untouched, old-growth areas. Rainforest Trust and our partner, Rede para Gestão Comunitária de Recursos Naturals (R-GCRN), are protecting 18,277 acres, about three-quarters the size of Disney World in Florida, to establish the Mabu Forest Conservation Area in Mozambique. This area—when protected—will safely store 1,642,148 metric tons of CO_2 equivalents.

TOP: MABU SUMMIT BUTTERFLIES BY JULIAN BAYLISS

EPAMERA MALAIKAE BY COLIN CONGDON

Pulling Rainforests Back from the Edge



The concept of planetary tipping points is not new. It was first introduced 20 years ago by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). At that time, scientists believed global warming needed to reach 5°C for the worst to happen, and that solutions could be found in time. But the planet lives out its own truths. This February, the IPCC declared that climate breakdown is accelerating even faster than predicted and at "only" 1°C to 2°C warming. The dreaded tipping points are moving closer, faster.

A tipping point is exactly what it sounds like, except, unlike a see-saw that goes up and down, when planetary disruptions assume critical mass, entire biophysical systems teeter at the edge of a global cliff. It's a long way down and the fall is irreversible. Have we reached that point yet? Not even the world's top climate scientists know for sure, but alarm bells are ringing louder each year in the scientific community.

The health of the Amazon rainforest—an area as large as the contiguous United States—represents one of our planet's most important climate tipping points. A study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* in March found that over the past 20 years, more than three-quarters of the Amazon rainforest has already lost some of its ability to bounce back from disruptions like drought and fire. In fact, world renowned scientists the late Dr. Thomas Lovejoy (Rainforest Trust board member) and his colleague Dr. Carlos Nobre announced in 2019 that they believed the Amazon tipping point might have already been reached.

At the current rate of deforestation—from logging, ranching, mining, agriculture and fires—27% of the Amazon's tree cover could be lost by 2030. That's an area twice the size of Texas, and would release unprecedented amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Even now, the Amazon is emitting more CO_2 than it absorbs, and still deforestation continues at an alarming rate.

Save Rainforests, Save the Planet

Rainforest Trust has been dedicated to saving rainforests for over 30 years because we recognize their importance for preserving biodiversity and stabilizing the climate. Your support has enabled us to work every day with partners in tropical and subtropical landscapes to identify habitats with the

BACKGROUND: AMAZON RIVER BY JOHNNY LYE.

greatest biodiversity and the most urgent threats. Now, after protecting over 39 million acres of fragile ecosystems, we must move faster and do more. Protecting these vibrant, functioning ecosystems is our only hope in addressing climate tipping points.

The alternative is unthinkable.

Dr. Thomas E. Lovejoy III - Groundbreaking Advocate for Nature

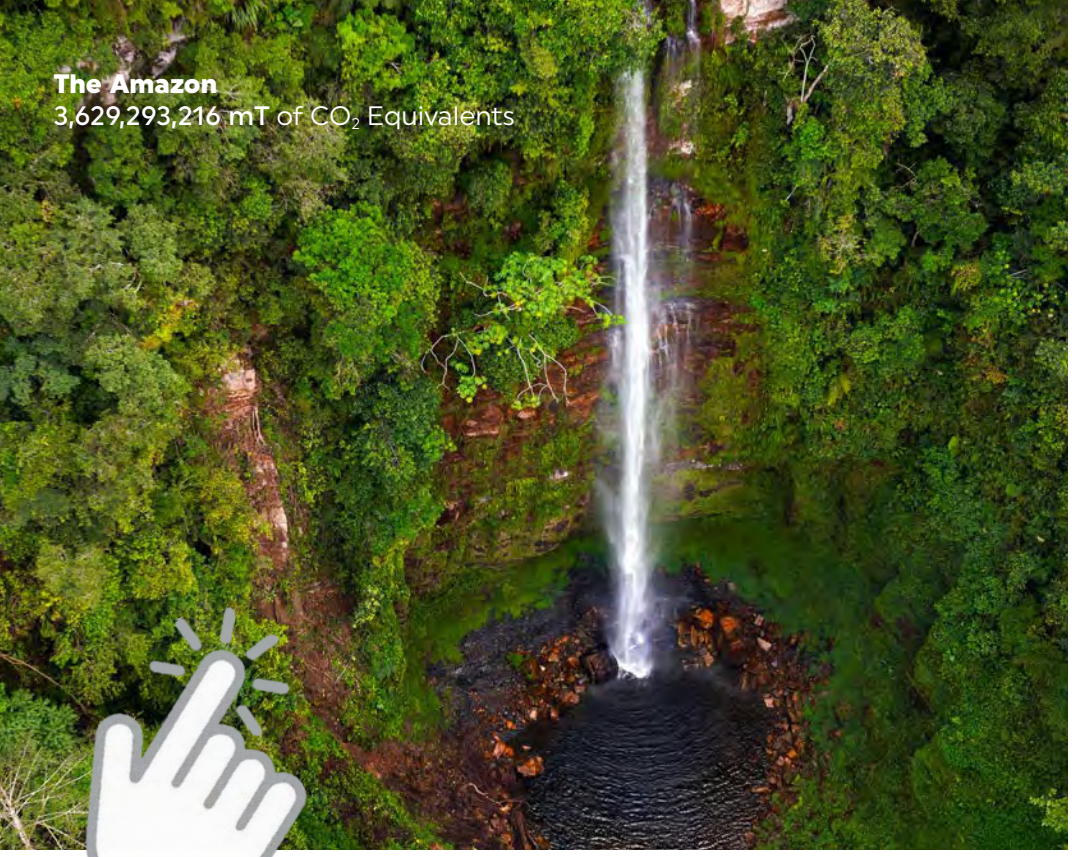
The late Dr. Thomas Lovejoy, lifelong Conservation Biologist. Tom was Professor at George Mason University, Chief Biodiversity Adviser to the President of the World Bank, Senior Adviser to the President of the United Nations Foundation, Biodiversity Chair of the Heinz Center for Science, Economics and the Environment, and cherished Rainforest Trust Board Member from 2013 until his passing in 2021.

Thomas Lovejoy, a beloved Rainforest Trust board member until his passing in December 2021, began working in the Brazilian Amazon in 1965. He was a groundbreaking scientist and advocate for nature who was an architect of the tipping point concept and introduced the term "biological diversity" in 1980.

Discovering a joyful reverence for all species as a youth, Dr. Lovejoy's profound impact on the field of conservation biology—which he helped establish—has been immeasurable. His work as an ecologist, scientist, advocate for nature, international advisor, professor and mentor reverberates worldwide, but maybe most powerfully in his efforts to save tropical rainforests.

Dr. Lovejoy's final book, *Ever Green: Saving Big Forests to Save the Planet*, co-written with fellow conservationist John Reid, is a fascinating look at his life as a scientist and explorer of forest landscapes and the teeming life—and mysteries—they hold.

Recognizing that Earth has limits and that our futures are intrinsically tied to them—for better and for worse—Dr. Lovejoy's life's work has supplied us with ample beacons to illuminate a sane path forward, should we choose to take it. He has shaped our mission and vision here at Rainforest Trust, and we are forever grateful.



Saving the World's Three Largest Rainforests

We all depend on the world's rainforests for their invisible, almost magical, powers to absorb carbon dioxide and release the life-sustaining oxygen we require to survive on Earth. Literally the lungs of our planet, rainforests maintain an interdependent, symbiotic relationship with all life on Earth—including ours.

Today, the rainforests—and millions of species that call them home—are depending on us for protection from continuing degradation. New data shows that rainforests, and the species living in them, may soon be facing extinction if we do not curb deforestation.

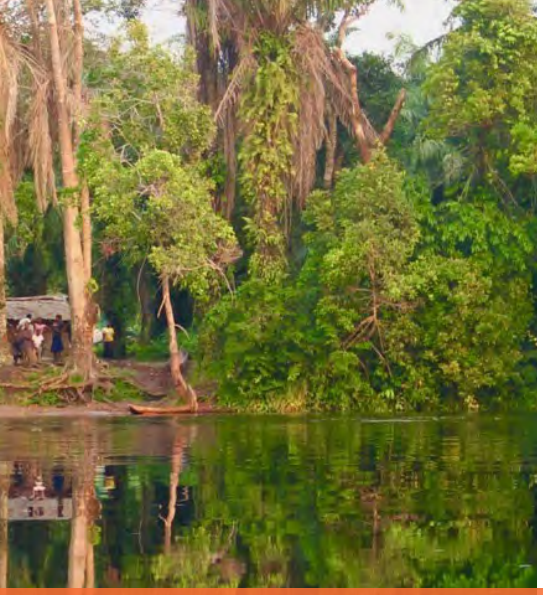
The Amazon

The CO_2 equivalent of **782,001,024** passenger vehicles driven for one year stored here

The Amazon is the largest, most biologically diverse rainforest in the world—and home to at least 3 million species. New data shows that the Amazon is approaching its tipping point, with more than 75% of the untouched forest losing stability since the early 2000s. This decreasing resilience signals a huge risk of degradation unless steps are taken now to halt deforestation and slow global climate change.

When our current projects with local partner CEDIA are complete, Rainforest Trust will have helped safeguard approximately 15 million acres and locked up more than 4 billion metric tons of CO_2 equivalents in the Peruvian Amazon. These acres include establishing the Sierra del Divisor National Park, and titling land with hundreds of Indigenous communities. In addition, 36 Endangered or Vulnerable species make their homes here, including the Giant Brazilian Otter (EN) and the White-bellied Spider Monkey (EN).

LEFT: OVERFLIGHT IMAGE BY CEDIA; **CENTER:** FISHING VILLAGE BY ABC EKOLO YA BONOBO; **RIGHT:** RAINFOREST IN TAINAN TAIWAN BY CHEN HSI FU/SHUTTERSTOCK



Bezos Earth Fund

With the generous support of the Bezos Earth Fund, Rainforest Trust has made a multi-year commitment to invest in the expansion of protected areas throughout the Amazon and the Congo Basin. Jeff Bezos launched the $10 billion Earth Fund in 2020 to combat the effects of climate change, and to preserve and protect the natural world.

Congo Basin

The CO_2 equivalent of **197,086,413** passenger vehicles driven for one year stored here

The second-largest rainforest on Earth, the Congo Basin in Central Africa spans six countries —Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. It is the least protected and most vulnerable of the world's three great rainforests due to lack of resources and political instability. With our partner, Strong Roots, we are working to protect 769,543 acres in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Protecting this area will safely store more than 166 million metric tons of CO_2 equivalents. This dense tropical forest is home to Critically Endangered species like Grauer's Gorilla, the newly recognized African Forest Elephant, and Chimpanzee (EN).

Another project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with our local partner, Les Amis des Bonobos du Congo, protected 117, 412 acres in the first phase. We are currently working to protect an additional 80,000 acres of carbon-rich swamp forest for the Congo's most iconic and threatened Endangered Bonobo. When completed, this reserve will lock up more than 76.3 million metric tons of CO_2 equivalents.

Southeast Asia

The CO_2 equivalent of **205,934,567** passenger vehicles driven for one year stored here

The rainforests of Southeast Asia, the third-largest in the world, total nearly 15% of Earth's tropical forests. More than 2,600 endemic species across Southeast Asia are at risk of losing their homes—and lives—due to habitat loss. **Rainforest Trust currently has 20 projects underway in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines.** In Malaysia, we completed a project with our partner, RIMBA, to secure 74,130 acres of unprotected forest connected to the Taman Negara National Park, an important Tiger Conservation Landscape.

We Must Act Now

Rainforest Trust has been protecting rainforests around the world for 30 years. Safeguarding these forests not only protects species and habitats—it is our best defense in our fight against climate change.

FEMALE (DUSKY) GLITTERING STARFRONTLET BY CHRIS BURNEY

The Glittering Starfrontlet

The High Andean cloud forest and páramo of Tatamá National Natural Park in the northwest corner of Colombia is home to one of the rarest hummingbirds on Earth—the Endangered Glittering Starfrontlet.

Feathered in iridescent hues of green and blue, the male sports a glittering emerald forehead and sapphire throat. Both males and females wear a dusting of golden spots that shimmer when sunlight finds them. It's no surprise that this bird's Spanish name, "Colibri del Sol," means "hummingbird of the sun."

Using its long black bill, this diminutive hummingbird relies on nectar and insects found along the forest-timberline-páramo habitats and nearby tall, humid forests of this biodiverse region. This Important Bird Area is under imminent threat as humans encroach on this vital ecosystem.

Meaning "grandfather of the rivers" in the Emberá-Chamí tradition, the Tatamá holds significant spiritual and cultural meaning to the local communities. The Andean forests and páramos here lie within two important watersheds that supply water to Afro-Colombian, Indigenous and peasant farming communities, most living in ethnic territories surrounding the park.

Rainforest Trust and our partners are working to protect this watershed by increasing Tatamá National Natural Park by 59,746 acres. Safeguarding this vulnerable ecosystem will enable the Glittering Starfrontlet and many other species to thrive here for generations to come.

TOP: GLITTERING OR DUSKY STARFRONTLET BY CHRIS BURNEY

Collectively Making an Impact: The Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force

It was a meeting of minds and hearts when more than 300 dedicated representatives from 40 states and provinces from around the world gathered in March for the 12th Annual Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force meeting in Manaus, Brazil.

These governors, community representatives, Indigenous peoples, civil society organizations and private sector members are united with a common goal—curbing tropical deforestation in order to address a shared concern over global climate change.

"The synergy was tangible at this meeting," said Mark Gruin, VP of Strategic Initiatives at Rainforest Trust. "The importance of networking is increasingly crucial. We made new relationships and reinforced those previously made. Sharing our conservation goals face-to-face is a vital step in this process."

"During the meeting, the Manaus Action Plan for a New Forest Economy was signed by 40 governors commiting to protect tropical forests and reduce deforestation," said Andrea Carneiro, Latin America Conservation Specialist at Rainforest Trust.

The Manaus Action Plan renewed the Task Force's commitment to reduce deforestation by at least 80%—relative to current levels—by 2030, as well as increase forest restoration.

BACKGROUND: BRAZIL RAINFOREST CANOPY BY RICHARD WHITCOMBE/SHUTTERSTOCK; **LEFT:** SPEAKER WILLIAM BOYD AT THE 2022 GCF TASK FORCE MEETING

"These two commitments made by these governments that collectively cover more than one-third of the world's tropical forests are completely aligned with Rainforest Trust's mission and key objectives," said Mark. "This alignment creates more opportunities for Rainforest Trust in its pursuit of a world where half the Earth's lands and waters are protected, providing refuge for wildlife and stabilizing the climate."

"The enthusiasm we received at the meeting was an affirmation that the conservation model we have followed for more than 30 years works," said Mark. "Our work is relevant and impactful to our partners on the ground—those who steward the natural resources they protect. The opportunity to communicate this to these global leaders generated immediate results, enabling us to identify exciting new partners and opportunities to create and expand protected areas, furthering the shared missions of the Task Force and Rainforest Trust."

TOP: MARIA TERESA VARGAS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dr. Edward O. Wilson - Champion for Conservation

Dr. Ridgely and Dr. Wilson
Photo by Rainforest Trust

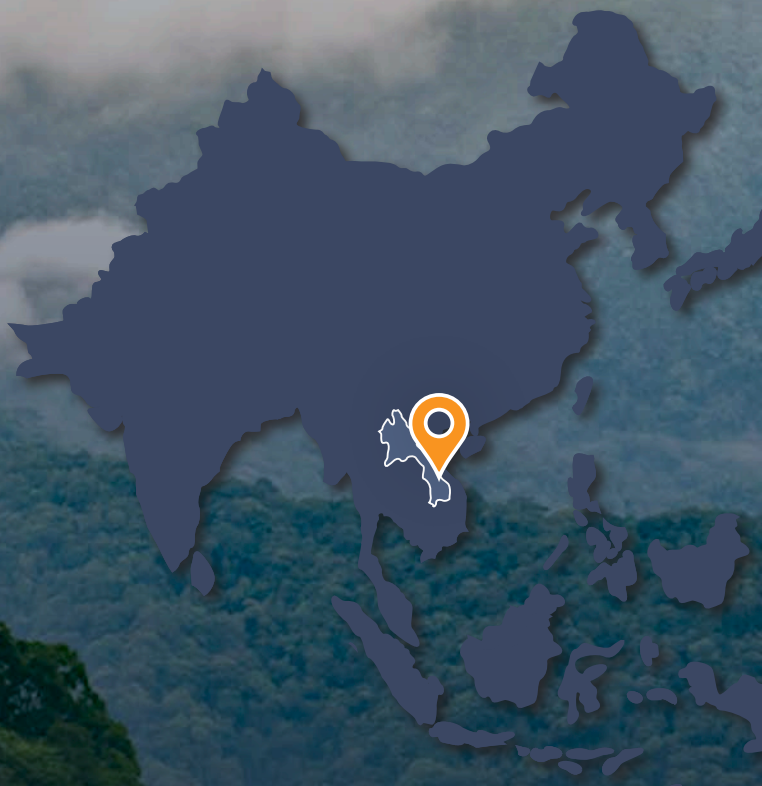
With the passing of Dr. Edward O. Wilson on December 26, 2021, the natural world and Rainforest Trust lost a true champion. A Pulitzer Prize-winning biologist, author, teacher and mentor, Dr. Wilson continued to work throughout his retirement to promote the importance of protecting biodiversity through conservation.

Many species have been named to honor Dr. Wilson, but in 2016, for the first time it was a bird. The *Myrmoderus eowilsoni* was discovered in the Amazonas Department by Josh Beck during a birding expedition. Beck decided to name the new antbird species in honor of Dr. Wilson after distinguished ornithologist and Rainforest Trust board member and President Emeritus Dr. Robert Ridgely.

A cherished Rainforest Trust board member since 2017, Dr. Wilson will be greatly missed. We are thankful for his insight and contributions to our work.

Urgent Project

Saving Species and Storing Carbon in Laos



The lush Annamite Range, a mountain chain spanning the Laos-Vietnam border in Southeast Asia, is rich in beauty, biodiversity and carbon. Once inhabited by elephants, tigers and rhinos, human activities—particularly deadly snaring practices—have voided these forests of many large mammals and left others at the brink of extinction.

Xe Sap National Protected Area (NPA) may be the last place on Earth where one of these rare species could still be found—the elusive Critically Endangered Saola. Also known as the "Asian Unicorn" because it is rarely seen, this species was discovered in 1992, making it the first large mammal new to science in over 50 years. In September 2013, an adult Saola was photographed by a camera trap in the Hue-Quang Nam landscape of Vietnam, directly across the border from Xe Sap.

Xe Sap NPA extends 377,000 acres across the Central Annamite Mountains, a biodiverse treasure in the heart of the Indo-Burma hotspot. This moist forest ecoregion shelters some of the world's highest concentrations of endemic species.

In addition to the Saola (CR), other threatened species here include the Large-antlered Muntjac (CR), Red-shanked Douc Langur (CR), Vietnamese Crested Argus (CR), Owston's Civet (EN), Dhole (EN), Northern Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon (EN) and the Greater Slow Loris (EN).

This fragile landscape is threatened by an increase in slash-and-burn agriculture, gold mining, illegal logging and small- to large-scale hydropower projects. These activities have led to the degradation of much of the remaining habitat and created another peril for wildlife living in the Annamites.

In addition to the mysterious and biodiverse species who call this home, the beauty of this mature secondary and wet evergreen forest is underscored by the massive amounts of carbon stored here. Rainforest Trust and our partner, WWF-Laos, are working to expand the Xe Sap NPA by 118,221 acres. Once protected, these acres will increase this contiguous, high-integrity forest for species by 25% and safely store 19,659,596 metric tons of CO_2 equivalents (equal to 4,236,038 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year).

LAOS - XE SAP NPA BY ADAM OSWELL-WWF

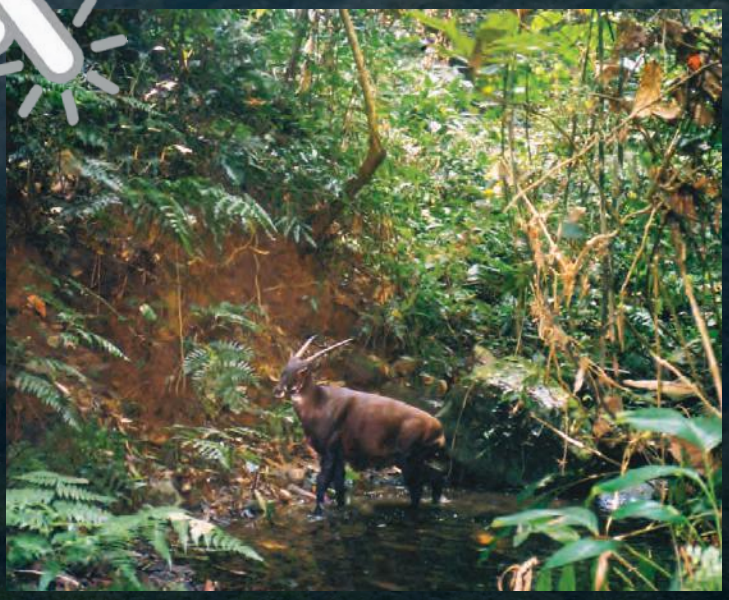
Fast Facts

Laos

118,221
ACRES

$1,513,514
PROJECT COST

19,659,596 mT
CO_2 EQUIVALENTS STORED



ONE OF THE RAREST MAMMALS IN THE WORLD, A SAOLA (CR) OR "ASIAN UNICORN," IS PHOTOGRAPHED BY A CAMERA TRAP IN CENTRAL LAOS. BY BILL ROBICHAUD

RUDI PUTRA WITH FORUM KONSERVASI LEUSER BY ULET IFANSASTI

Voices on the Ground: Rudi Putra | Strategic Conservation Advisor for FKL

Common purpose among uncommon heroes in Indonesia

Rudi Putra has overcome nearly insurmountable odds to achieve extraordinary conservation success in the 6-million-acre Leuser Ecosystem in Indonesia. A born leader, he has built effective partnerships among multiple diverse groups of people to save imperiled species from powerful commercial interests and criminals that threaten to destroy them. The work is never done, but it is in capable hands.

Rudi's secret weapon is at once powerful and fundamental: he listens to people, one by one, taking time to build trust, and then inspires them to a common purpose. In this case, saving one of Asia's last magnificent rainforests.

The Leuser ecosystem lies on the westernmost island of Indonesia in the province of Aceh, Sumatra. **It is the last place on Earth where orangutans, rhinos, elephants and tigers coexist in the wild with hundreds of other rare species**—like the Helmeted Hornbill (CR), Lar Gibbon (EN) and Sun Bear (VU)—that face persistent threats, especially from illegal oil palm plantations. This carbon-rich landscape is the source of water and livelihood for over 4 million people.

Fascinated from an early age by wildlife—especially the Sumatran Rhino (CR)—Rudi led communities in dismantling over 1,200 acres of illegal oil palm plantations early in his career. "I brought together local community members, village chiefs, NGOs and government to advocate for Leuser," Rudi said. "We had to start small building support for conservation."

In 2013, Rudi established Forum Konservasi Leuser (FKL) or Leuser Conservation Forum, a local non-profit that has grown significantly in both size and impact, now employing 400 local people. FKL Wildlife Protection Rangers patrol 80% of the Leuser rainforest. Since 2017, they have reduced by 80% the number of snares that threaten endangered wildlife.

"The poachers are on alert now that we are out here," Rudi said. "Our next step is to expand the team so we are covering 100% of Leuser and creating more jobs for local people."

In 2014, Rudi was awarded the Goldman Environmental Award honoring grassroots environmental heroes for his conservation victories and for bringing worldwide attention to the destruction of the Leuser Ecosystem.

Since 2016, Rainforest Trust has partnered with FKL to protect 4,000 acres of critical habitat that is an important wildlife corridor for the Endangered Asian Elephant and other at-risk species. We have supported FKL to strengthen their collaborative programs, document the rich biodiversity of Leuser, and employ local people to manage and patrol the forest.

"I never believed that we could achieve this success in protecting the Leuser ecosystem," Rudi Putra said. "This work is very hard and it takes time. I thank Rainforest Trust for keeping the faith. We have achieved great things together."

RUDI PUTRA AND RANGERS FROM FORUM KONSERVASI LEUSER BY ULET IFANSASTI

Protecting Acres Prevents Fires

We have all heard about the fires ravaging the Amazon, the world's largest, most biodiverse forest. Left to their own devices, intact rainforests—where humidity can reach 88% and yearly rainfall can equal up to 400 inches—do not easily burn.

So, why so many fires? The answer is deforestation, the process by which workers first harvest valuable timber then burn the remaining vegetation to make way for crops like soy and oil palm plantations or for cattle grazing. The tropics—including Brazil, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Indonesia—lost more than 27.4 million acres of tree cover in 2021, with nearly 9.3 million acres of that loss occurring in tropical primary rainforests that are especially important for biodiversity and carbon storage.

Stopping deforestation through the creation of legal protected areas significantly reduces the risk of forest fires. Last year, Rainforest Trust, in partnership with Fundación Natura Bolivia and an alliance of Indigenous communities, protected over 2.2 million acres of eastern Bolivia's Bajo Paraguá forest. With our support, local residents were equipped and trained to fight fires at the edge of the deforestation frontier. As a result, there were 65% fewer fires detected in 2021 compared to 2020.

In Madagascar, Rainforest Trust supported our partner Malagasy Institut pour la Conservation des Ecosystèmes Tropicaux (MICET) in creating 13.6 miles of firebreaks around the proposed 3,460-acre Ivohiboro Protected Area. Working with MICET, 1,700 villagers dug wide strips of bare soil to prevent fires burning outside from impacting this forest. Intentionally started fires here are easily exacerbated during droughts. Despite drought conditions, burning was minimized by the firebreaks.

While no fire prevention can boast 100% success, legally protecting land does limit the risk of fire by stopping illegal deforestation. Combined with fire-fighting tools and training that empowers local residents, forests are much more fire-safe.

TOP: FOREST FIRE IN CAMEROON BY JAN MASTNIK/SHUTTERSTOCK; **LEFT:** ABURNED PEAT FIELD IN BORNEO BY THOMMY TFH/SHUTTERSTOCK

Rainforest Climate Action Fund

Support the Rainforest Climate Action Fund

The Rainforest Climate Action Fund supports projects that cost-effectively store and sequester vast quantities of carbon, like intact rainforests, mangroves and peat-rich wetlands, to tackle climate change.

SOUTH EAST ASIA FOREST BY TEO TARRAS/SHUTTERSTOCK

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