

Edited  
by  
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## Orangutans fading to black

Orangutans may face extinction sooner than previously expected according to a new study published in *Oryx—The International Journal of Conservation*. The lead author (Dr Serge Wich of the Great Ape Trust of Iowa) and other orangutan conservation experts revealed that by using improved assessment methodology, their research shows there are lower numbers of orangutans on the islands of Sumatra and Borneo than previously reported.

Orangutans living outside of national parks are quickly losing their homes to illegal logging, mining, encroachment by palm oil plantations, and fires. The lack of enforcement in conservation management strategies is a major cause for the rapid decline in orangutan populations. However, recent actions are showing that forest conservation is becoming a more important issue in regional political agendas. A temporary logging moratorium in an area of Sumatra has stabilized orangutan habitat, while opportunities to develop reduced-impact logging systems may help on the island of Borneo. However, the study claims that the orangutan may be the first great ape to go extinct unless extraordinary efforts are made soon.

## Hidden tribe threatened by alleged deforestation

Rare photos of an uncontacted tribe living near the Brazilian-Peruvian border made major international news in May 2008. Although the tribe's existence had been on record since 1910, the recent confirmation of their continued presence in that area drew attention to logging activities and alleged deforestation taking place on the border of Peru and Brazil. These activities may threaten the environment as well as the existence of such tribes living in those areas.

In a mission to confirm that tribes in that area were flourishing under Brazil's no contact and protection policy, experts on indigenous tribes from the Brazilian Indian Protection Agency (Funai) were able to track down the tribe using an aircraft, GPS data and Google Earth coordinates and maps. Survival International ([www.survival-international.org/](http://www.survival-international.org/)) and Funai, the organizations that released the photographs, justified their decision to publicize the tribe's existence since the media attention caused Peru to re-examine its logging policy in the area where the tribe was



**Leave us alone:** Uncontacted Indians in western Brazil, May 2008. Photo: Gleison Miranda/Funai



**Sad news:** The orangutan may soon face extinction due to illegal logging, mining, encroachment by palm oil plantations, and fires. Photo: Sarawak Forestry Department

photographed. Survival International estimates that there are over 100 such uncontacted tribes worldwide.

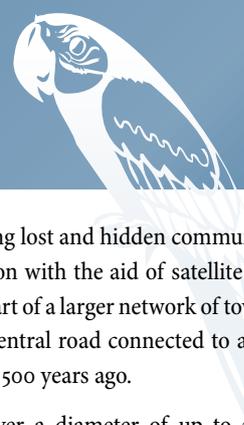
## EU, Ghana sign illegal timber deal

The European Union (EU) and Ghana recently signed a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) under the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) program that is designed to stop illegally felled timber from Ghana from entering the EU market. The Agreement is regarded as a landmark deal to fight illegal timber trade by ensuring that all timber exported from Ghana is certified as legal. World Bank statistics indicate that up to 60% of Ghana's logging in recent years has been classified as illegal.

The VPA requires Ghana to impose stricter controls on forestry activities ranging from remote harvesting operations to timber handling at export ports. The EU, which consumes more than 50% of Ghana's timber exports (worth over US\$400 million a year), will ban entry to shipments of Ghana's timber that are not verified, audited and licensed as being of legal origin under the VPA. By signing the VPA, Ghana hopes to gain a competitive edge in the EU market. Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Indonesia and Malaysia are all currently involved in VPA negotiations with the EU.

## Study pinpoints deforestation hotspots

A new study published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) provides the most accurate assessment of tropical deforestation to date.



The main finding is that deforestation is focused in certain 'hotspots' rather than being widely dispersed over multiple locations and countries, according to the collaborative study conducted by the World Resources Institute and other researchers. According to their analysis, over 60% of the world's deforestation is taking place in two countries, with Brazil responsible for 48% of global deforestation and Indonesia responsible for 13% (mostly in just two peat-land areas). Deforestation in Africa was relatively insignificant in comparison.

The study implemented a new method of combining satellite systems to pinpoint areas of forest loss and calculate changes within areas throughout the tropics. The approach largely eliminates human bias and differences in methodologies and allows large-scale analyses to be completed accurately, consistently and in a timely manner. The results of this study should prove instrumental in helping governments and other forestry stakeholders to target areas where deforestation is taking place and focus efforts in these problem areas.

### **Brazil rounds up cattle for rainforests**

The Brazilian government has seized livestock grazing illegally in the Amazon, according to recent reports by the Associated Press. Government officials seized 3100 head of cattle they claim were raised on an ecological reserve in the state of Para. This move was to serve as a warning to other ranchers who are using illegally deforested land in Amazonia to graze cattle. Herds of up to 60 000 cows are being grazed on such land, according to environment minister Carlos Minc.

Mr Minc pledged that tougher enforcement measures would be directed at "those that don't respect environmental legislation". Seized cattle are to be auctioned off and the proceeds to go to Fome Zero, the government's food program, as well as to health programs for indigenous peoples and to finance the cattle seizure program.

Although annual deforestation figures fell to a 16 year low in 2007, government agencies reported this year that forest clearing was on the rise again, blaming the cattle farmers for much of the increase.

### **Deforestation debate in PNG**

A study recently conducted by the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and Australian National University (ANU), based on satellite images taken over three decades from the 1970s to 2002, claims that forests in PNG are being cleared quickly and that more than half of its trees could be lost by 2021.

The release of this report has created controversy, however, with one resource expert (also from ANU) calling its findings "grossly exaggerated". This expert (quoted in *Forestry and Development E-News*) claims that the study incorrectly represents the true state of PNG deforestation by combining figures for deforestation and forest degradation, and assuming that all degraded areas would succumb to complete deforestation. Critics have also lashed the report's focus on the commercial timber industry as a major driver of deforestation, claiming that fuelwood removals and agriculture development were in fact major factors behind the problem.

### **Garden cities bloomed in Amazon**

The journal *Science* recently published a paper stating that the Amazon rainforest was at one time an immense sprawl of interconnected villages.

Researchers consisting of anthropologists from universities from the USA and Brazil, together with members of the Kuikuro, an Amazonian indigenous tribe descended from the region's original inhabitants, spent more than a

decade studying, mapping and uncovering lost and hidden communities in the Xingu region of the Brazilian Amazon with the aid of satellite images. They found that the communities were part of a larger network of towns and villages each with a similarly oriented central road connected to a central plaza and dating from between 1500 and 500 years ago.

These garden cities were spread out over a diameter of up to 250 km, covering areas of almost 5 million ha but with only about 50 000 people spread throughout the many interconnected settlements that each housed upward of 1000 inhabitants. Remains of dams and artificial ponds were found around settlements which could indicate that the inhabitants farmed fish, a potentially viable livelihood option for indigenous tribes in the region today. The largest such settlements were dated at between 1000 and 500 years old, with their (and their inhabitants') subsequent demise presumed to be a result of contact with disease-carrying Europeans.

The settlements are almost completely overgrown now but the Kuikuro (who are adept at identifying tell-tale signs of old settlements, from 'dark earth' that indicates past human waste dumps or farming, concentrations of pottery shards and earthworks) were able to help the researchers to locate various reference points on which to focus the satellite analysis.

Although the Amazon rainforest is often thought of as pristine, this discovery shows that the region's forests have been shaped by human activity for many centuries. The researchers conclude that the existence of such settlements in the Amazon will influence future conservation and management strategies in the region, as well as challenging stereotypes regarding the relative sophistication of the development of old-world versus new-world urban planning.

## **Assistance for timber traders**

The Timber Trade Action Plan (TTAP) is a 7 year project that began in March 2005 and is co-funded by the European Commission, participating timber trade federations and their members. It was developed by the European timber trade federations (TTFs) to assist their suppliers to deliver verified legal timber to the EU. TTAP is managed by the Tropical Forest Trust (TFT) who provides technical expertise to timber suppliers in Africa, Asia, China and South America to help them supply verified legal timber to the importer.

TTAP's main task is to help tropical suppliers demonstrate that their timber is legal. As a key project in the EU's forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT) program, TTAP also aims to help to: develop European trade federations' purchasing policies to ensure consistency with government buyers and FLEGT requirements; provide guidance to buyers on how to meet EU requirements on legality and chain of custody; and minimize the risk of illegal wood entering a supply chain. However, the core objective of TTAP remains to ensure the legal verification of at least 70 supply chains in the following producer countries: Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Gabon, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Bolivia, Brazil, Guyana and Suriname.

TTAP is open to members of timber trade federation partners. Members interested in taking part in TTAP and benefiting from TTF's expertise and the EU's financial support can apply through their trade federation. Producer country companies should approach TTAP to investigate how to get involved.

To find out more visit the TTAP website: [www.timbertradeactionplan.info](http://www.timbertradeactionplan.info)

*ITTO assistance is also available to companies and governments in producer member countries to demonstrate the legality of their timber exports. For details contact: [itto@itto.or.jp](mailto:itto@itto.or.jp).*