



Parson's chameleon



Central American Harpy eagle



www.rainforestSOS.org

Fact sheet

Why rainforests matter

1. Why do rainforests matter?

They are important because they offer homes to trees, other plants, animals, and local people – but they also play a big role in keeping the Earth's climate and our weather as we know it.

2. Where are they?

Over 80 countries in the tropics (where the sun is hottest) have rainforests.

3. What is a rainforest?

Plants and animals make up the rainforest. They are home to half the world's known plants



and animals. There are 5 layers.

1. The emergent layer at treetop height.
2. The canopy layer where the leaves form a 'ceiling'.
3. The understory layer that is dark and humid.
4. The shrub layer.
5. The forest floor.



Amazonian squirrel monkey

4. What foods come from the rainforest?

Rainforests give us crops and medicines, like rice and

potatoes, nuts, spices, coffee and chocolate.

5. How do they create the Earth's climate?

Rainforests stop flooding and provide rain. The trees soak up tropical rainfall and then slowly release the water into the air to form rainclouds. These clouds are then carried by the winds to other countries where they 'feed' the crops. The trees also remove carbon dioxide, a global warming gas. They store the carbon in their trunks and release the oxygen that we breathe.

What's happening to tropical rainforests?

1. Why are trees being chopped down?

In the past trees were cut down to clear land to grow food locally and graze animals. This is subsistence farming. But today the trees and the land are used to grow crops for products like

- soy or soya
- palm oil / vegetable oil
- beef
- timber, paper
- precious metals



Goliath beetle

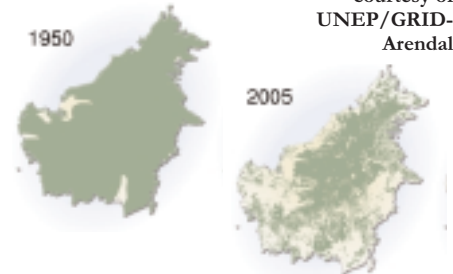
2. How much of the rainforest is being lost?

Every year about 13 million hectares of rainforest are lost – the same as 8.5 million football pitches a year, or an amazing 23,483 pitches a day.

3. What is replacing the trees?

Cattle farming, plantations, paper mills, mining, roads and towns are replacing the trees.

The extent of deforestation in Borneo. Images courtesy of UNEP/GRID-Arendal



4. What does it mean?

Cutting down rainforests means we lose the trees, plants and animals and it affects our climate and the way we live. The rainforests support our way of life and their loss will affect us all.