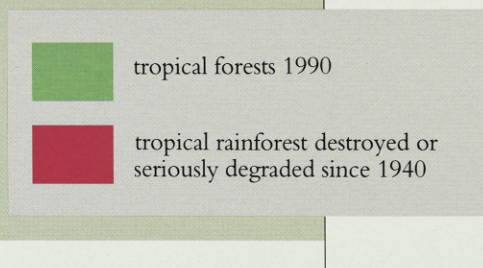


The destruction of tropical rainforest since 1940. Almost half of the world's tropical rainforest has been lost in this time.



the primary cause of forest destruction. Out of a \$US6 billion international trade in tropical timbers, New Zealand's imports are tiny compared with those of Japan, the United States and Europe. However, this in no way excuses our involvement in a destructive trade, and the social and environmental catastrophe that follows in its wake.

These tropical timbers plus western red cedar logged from temperate rainforests in western Canada – in other words timber from unsustainable rainforest sources – now make up almost 80 percent of New Zealand's timber imports by volume. Not a good record for a country which prides itself on being "green" and environmentally conscious.

WHY are tropical rainforests so special? Firstly, they are the richest source of life on earth. Even though they cover only six percent of the land area, they are home to most of the estimated 10 to 50 million species found on this planet. Scientists currently estimate that 50 different

wild species become extinct every day. The long-term consequences of this loss of biodiversity are incalculable.

The rich gene pool of tropical forests is a valuable source of raw materials other than timber. Pharmaceuticals, medicines, organic insecticides, fruits and nuts, fibres, resins, oils and craft materials are impor-

Tropical rainforests provide a home or a livelihood to over 500 million people around the world. There are over 30 million people living in or on the edge of rainforests in South-east Asia and the Pacific Islands. Commercial logging and the subsequent degradation is threatening these traditional lifestyles and cultures.



The orang-utan, literally "person of the forest", inhabits the rainforests of Borneo and Sumatra. It is dependent on the integrity of these forests and is now seriously threatened by loss of its habitat from logging and forest clearance. Currently it is estimated that about 50 species of plants and animals become extinct each day around the world, most of them in tropical forests.

tant to both the local and international community. For example, 70 percent of all plants identified by the US National Cancer Institute as useful in cancer treatment, are found only in tropical rainforests. The trade in rattan and other non-timber products in South-east Asia is valued at over US\$3.5 billion, without even considering the importance of the products to the domestic economies.



A member of the nutmeg family from the rainforests of Samoa. The rich gene pool of tropical forests has many other present and potential uses apart from timber, including foods and medicines.

In some areas, such as Sarawak, Burma and parts of Indonesia, serious human rights abuses are connected to the logging. The Penan people of Sarawak, for example, continue to be arrested and threatened with violence by the Sarawak government for defending their customary forests from logging (see *Forest & Bird* May 1991).

Rainforests have a major stabilising influence on global, regional and local atmosphere and climate and their destruction is second only to the burning of fossil fuels as a source of greenhouse gases. On a local and regional level, tropical rainforest loss causes water shortages, droughts and floods. Deforestation was blamed for severe water shortages in seven out of eleven Peninsular Malaysian

