

# Rainforest Corridor Programme

Sri Lanka is the most biologically diverse country in Asia and part of a global biodiversity hotspot. But studies estimate that its tropical forests, which harbour roughly 90% of the country's endemic species, are disappearing at a rate of 1.6% annually. Although there are still many areas of non-native productive forest, extensive agricultural and silvicultural expansion over the past 150 years has left only an estimated 6% of primary rainforest. These critical forest ecosystems are highly fragmented and under increasing threat.

It is not only the native environment that bears the costs of forest loss in Sri Lanka; valuable traditional forest products such as timbers and medicinal plants and ecological services such as watershed protection are also disappearing. Protecting Sri Lanka's remaining primary rainforest is critical not only for biodiversity conservation but also for human livelihood security.

More work urgently needs to be done to ensure the long-term survival of Sri Lanka's remaining rainforest and the endemic amphibians, reptiles, insects, plants, and small mammals that live in them. The isolation of animals that live in forest patches makes them particularly vulnerable to extinction. The extent of species disappearance due to habitat loss has not been accurately researched but it is believed to be vast – scientists have already documented the extinction of 21 endemic amphibians.

Since 2002, we have been working to restore and conserve the highly threatened rainforest habitat between Sinharaja World Heritage Forest Reserve and Kanneliya Forest Reserve, which are critical biodiversity reservoirs. Our long-term Rainforest Corridor programme aims to protect and increase habitats and conservation areas for vulnerable rainforest species.



*Sinharaja Forest Reserve*

By establishing biodiversity corridors, species will be able to move between habitat patches. These linkages help to stop extinction by creating more habitats, maintaining migratory pathways during times of environmental change, and encouraging breeding to help maintain viable populations.

Due to the Sri Lanka's high population density much of the land surrounding the remaining rainforest patches is inhabited by people. Therefore we have chosen an approach that combines the conservation of forest patches with smallholder land-development and community programmes.

Project components are:

- Corridor mapping and planning
- Conservation of remnant forest patches
- Livelihood and agriculture biodiversity development through sustainable agriculture
- Ecological restoration
- Lobbying for the development of a policy structure more compatible with corridor development
- Environmental education
- Endangered species conservation

For this project we have formed productive linkages with local farmers, schools, and government agencies. The effectiveness of these programs is already being realized – we have received multiple requests from communities seeking to address various environmental problems and protect these important areas for future generations.

Completed work:

- Initial mapping of corridor area
- Rainforest School programme in Hiniduma
- Purchase of 18 acres of degraded land in Hiniduma with support from Rainforest Concern and the Rainforest Trust of Sri Lanka.
  - On 8 acres of this land we are developing the Hiniduma ecocentre which will serve as a venue for research, training, community outreach and conservation tourism.
  - The remaining 10 acres is being restored to natural forest via Analog Forestry.
- Restoration of 4 acres of land in Baddegama funded by Rainforest Rescue Australia

