



INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION ISSUES

THE PHILIPPINES



In the Philippines, the main reason for the loss of rain forests is the overharvesting of valuable hardwood trees, which are abundant there. This overharvesting has been driven by worldwide demand for fine hardwoods (primarily the wood of the lauan, or Philippine mahogany tree). Mahogany wood is used to make furniture, paneling, musical instruments, boat trims, door and window frames, shingles, and siding. The continuing demand for hardwoods has accelerated deforestation.

75 percent of amphibians, 70 percent of reptiles, 44 percent of birds, and

64 percent of the mammals that occur in the Philippines are found nowhere else in the world.

The fibers of the abaca are used to make rope, textiles, and hats. Mangrove trees and nipa palms grow in dense clusters in coastal swamps. More than 200 Philippine plant species are threatened by deforestation. Nearly 125 bird species are endangered in the Philippines, and several of these are endemic eagle species. More than 60 wild mammal species are endangered. One endangered mammal is the Asian leopard, the only wildcat species found in the Philippines.

More than 250 reptile and amphibian species are found in the Philippines, including about 125 lizard and 90 frog species. At the present time, 11 reptiles are listed as endangered.

Conservation issues include:

The Depletion of Natural Resources

Land Ownership and Management

Deforestation

Conservation Issues

The Depletion of Natural Resources: The clearing of forest land produced large deforested areas and increased soil erosion. The fishing industry was also poorly managed, with fish being overharvested from New Zealand's oceans. Fortunately, the government recognized the seriousness of these problems and, many years ago, began to implement conservation and resource management methods. Today, the primary emphasis of logging and fishing operations is on sustainable yields and conservation.

The Problem of Exotic Species: First, because the native vegetation didn't evolve along with grazing animals, it had no natural defenses against these animals. Thus, many plant species were severely depleted through overgrazing and eventually became extinct. Second, the deer, rabbit, and opossum populations had no natural predators on the islands. The numbers of these animals exploded, and their foraging placed a severe strain on the ecosystem. At the present time, there are approximately 2,300 plant species in New Zealand, and about 1,900 of these are endemic. More than 230 native plant species are listed as threatened. The primary conservation concern is the destruction of native plant populations through grazing, and the resulting loss of habitat and food sources for native animal species. However, some exotic animals (like stoats and feral cats) directly prey on native small mammals and birds, seriously threatening the populations of some rarer species. Increased conservation management and changes in attitudes have slowed species decline in recent decades. The rate of habitat loss is much lower today compared to historic levels. Also, biologists studying native species have made great advances into understanding how these species need to be managed. Finally, New Zealand has established several island sanctuaries that are free of introduced predators. These islands also have revegetation projects designed to recreate native vegetation systems.

AUSTRALIA

Australia is very fortunate to have an intensive government-sponsored conservation program. In fact, two government branches are responsible for managing Australia's vast natural resources: the Department of Environment and Heritage and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry. The indiscriminate clearing of temperate woodlands for agriculture decreased that coverage greatly, and today, only about 15 percent of the forest cover remains. This was a very poor land management strategy, because Australian soils are thin, and the removal of natural vegetation increases the amount of erosion caused by wind and rain. The overgrazing of domestic animals has also placed a serious strain on native plant species and further enhanced erosion. Wetlands have also been widely drained for agriculture, destroying natural wildlife habitats. The cutting of trees for timber, wood chips, and pulp is also placing a strain on forest ecosystems. Over 50 percent of Australia's temperate forests and 75 percent of its rain forests have already been cleared, and woodcutting activities continue daily. Timber harvesting has serious negative effects on wildlife. The removal of old trees severely reduces the size of natural habitats for mammals, birds, and insects. It also contributes to the loss of food sources for these animals. About 10 percent of the 188 mammal species associated with Australian forests have been declared extinct, over 97 different species of vascular plants are extinct, and another 2,000 plants are listed as endangered. The growth is occurring faster than city planners can develop new roads, railways, and buildings. Population growth and increased energy consumption are leading to a serious increase in the amount of pollution released into the water, particularly from industrial plants, manufacturing businesses, and improperly maintained ore and petroleum oil ships. As a result, the water quality around shorelines is declining.

There has been some loss of native species as a result of exotic introductions. Introduction of non-native mammals has led to the near extinction of the red squirrel and the dilution of the gene pool for the red deer. Because of the high percentage of private ownership, nature conservation and landscape protection in the U.K. are tightly linked with agricultural practices. Therefore, there's constant interaction between official nature conservation bodies and agricultural oversight agencies. Nongovernmental organizations also play a critical role in nature conservation in the U.K., and many own or lease their own protected areas. Through a joint initiative between the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Commission, the government plans to establish nine 'community forests' covering more than 1,500 square miles of land adjacent to cities in England and Wales. Air pollution and acidification appear to be affecting communities throughout the country, in spite of the fact that emission levels for many gases have been stabilized or have dropped markedly in recent years. However, there's evidence that tree species such as beech and oak are suffering health declines, partly due to the effects of air pollution. One of the leading conservation groups in this area is English Heritage, an organization dedicated to the preservation of historic buildings, landscapes, and archaeological sites.

THE NETHERLANDS

The Dutch government has several programs charged with the management of natural resources. Since 1982, the main government body concerned with protected areas and nature conservation is the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management, and Fisheries. The current emphases of Dutch conservation are sustainable development and the restoration of ecological and landscape values. Environmental emissions, acid rain, and water pollution are currently the most serious threats to the environment of the Netherlands. Acid rain is said to have killed tree foliage in half of the country's forests. Automotive and industrial emissions are the source of the acid in the rain. Water pollution has also been responsible for several episodes of massive wildlife death in the North Sea. the activities of hunting and sport fishing have been linked to the severe erosion of some riverbanks and shorelines. The number of visitors to protected wildlife areas is also on the increase. In an effort to offset the environmental strain caused by tourism, the Dutch have created a national ecological network of connected nature areas.

CANADA

The commercial exploitation of forests over the years has caused a lot of damage, particularly the loss of wildlife habitats and soil erosion. A number of fish stocks in Canada declined significantly in the late twentieth century, mainly due to unsustainable levels of harvesting and water pollution. The decline of salmon stocks in the western part of the country is particularly troubling to both conservationists and fishers. The increasing importance of tourism has had many benefits for conservation, since outdoor recreation of all types are important Canadian attractions. Unfortunately, in recent years, the tundra region has become the focus of increased petroleum mining and shipping. The damage caused by heavy equipment and drilling operations, as well as direct oil spills, are increasingly threatening the stability of animal habitats in this area. Water pollution and the long-lasting effects of oil spills are a particular threat to the animals that inhabit the Arctic waters, such as the seal and several species of whale. Many other government agencies are also responsible for natural resource management. For example, over 120 different government and private organizations are involved in acquiring and managing lands for conservation. Combined, these agencies control resource management over more than 70 percent of the Canadian landmass. However, Canada has already lost 65 percent of its tidal marshes and 70 percent of its wetlands in some regions. Population growth, accompanied by urban development and resourcebased industries (such as mining and forestry) are contributing to the loss of natural habitats. Timber-cutting corporations often prefer to use the clearcutting method because it's inexpensive and fast. However, clearcutting produces a loss of wildlife habitats that has been linked to the decline of many species, including the northern spotted owl.