

# New climate treaty could put species at risk

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Plans to be discussed at the forthcoming UN climate conference in Copenhagen to cut deforestation in developing countries could save some species from extinction but inadvertently increase the risk to others, scientists believe.

A team of eleven of the world's top tropical forest scientists, coordinated by the University of Leeds, warn that while cutting clearance of carbon-rich tropical forests will help reduce climate change and save species in those forests, governments could risk neglecting other forests that are home to large numbers of endangered species.

Under new UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) proposals, the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) scheme would curb carbon emissions by financially rewarding tropical countries that reduce deforestation.

Governments implicitly assume that this is a win-win scheme, benefiting climate and species. Tropical forests contain half of all species and half of all carbon stored in terrestrial vegetation, and their destruction accounts for 18% of global carbon emissions.

However, in a paper published in the latest issue of [Current Biology](#), the scientists warn that if REDD focuses solely on protecting forests with the greatest density of carbon, some biodiversity may be sacrificed.

"Concentrations of carbon density and biodiversity in tropical forests only partially overlap," said Dr Alan Grainger of the University of

Leeds, joint leader of the international team. "We are concerned that governments will focus on cutting deforestation in the most carbon-rich forests, only for clearance pressures to shift to other high biodiversity forests which are not given priority for protection because they are low in carbon."

"If personnel and funds are switched from existing conservation areas they too could be at risk, and this would make matters even worse."

If REDD is linked to carbon markets then biodiversity hotspot areas - home to endemic species most at risk of extinction as their habitats are shrinking rapidly - could be at an additional disadvantage, because of the higher costs of protecting them.

According to early estimates up to 50% of tropical biodiversity hotspot areas could be excluded from REDD for these reasons. Urgent research is being carried out across the world to refine these estimates.

Fortunately, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is still negotiating the design of REDD and how it is to be implemented.

The team is calling for rules to protect biodiversity to be included in the text of the Copenhagen Agreement. It also recommends that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change give greater priority to studying this issue, and to producing a manual to demonstrate how to co-manage ecosystems for carbon and [biodiversity](#) services.

"Despite the best of intentions, mistakes can easily happen because of poor design" said Dr Grainger. "Clearing [tropical forests](#) to increase biofuel production to combat [climate change](#) is a good example of this. Governments still have time at Copenhagen to add rules to REDD to ensure that it does not make a similar mistake. A well designed REDD can save many species and in our paper we show how this can be done."

Source: University of Leeds ([news](#) : [web](#))

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