

Threatened frogs palmed off as forests disappear

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Oil palm plantations in Malaysia are causing threatened forest frogs to disappear, paving the way for common species to move in on their turf, scientists have revealed.

The study, carried out by the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) describes how forests converted to palm oil plantations are causing threatened [forest](#) dwelling frogs to vanish, resulting in an overall loss of habitat that is important for the conservation of threatened [frog species](#) in the region.

Scientists travelled to [Peninsular Malaysia](#) where they spent two years studying communities of frog [species](#) in four [oil palm plantations](#) and two areas of adjacent forest. The paper is published in the journal *Conservation Biology*.

Aisyah Faruk, PhD student at ZSL's Institute of Zoology says: "The impact we observed is different from that observed previously for mammals and birds. Instead of reducing the number of species, oil palm affects amphibian communities by replacing habitat suitable for threatened species with habitat used by [amphibian species](#) that are not important for conservation. This more subtle effect is still equally devastating for the conservation of biodiversity in Malaysia."

Amphibians are the most threatened [vertebrates](#) in the world, with over 40% at risk of extinction. The peat swamp frog (*Limnonectes malesianus*) is just one of the declining species threatened due to deforestation. It

inhabits shallow, gentle streams, swampy areas, and very flat forests, laying eggs in sandy streambeds. Scientists only found this species in forest areas, and if palm oil plantations continue to take over, the peat swamp frog, along with its forest home, could be a thing of the past.

ZSL's Dr. Trent Garner, a co-author on the paper, says: "Existing practices in managing oil palm are not accommodating the highly threatened forest frog species in Malaysia which urgently need saving."

The planting of oil palm plantations leads to the loss of natural forests and peat lands and plays havoc with ecosystems and biodiversity. ZSL, together with collaborators from Queen Mary University of London, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and University of Malaya, continues to work closely with Malaysian palm oil producers in determining if simple modifications to agricultural practices may bring some of the forest species back into areas planted with oil palm and allow them to survive and reproduce in plantations.

Provided by Zoological Society of London

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