Research partnership is key to biodiversity conservation

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A new policy paper led by University of York scientists, in partnership with Proforest, aims to increase awareness among researchers of the High Conservation Value (HCV) approach to safeguarding ecosystems and species.

The HCV approach is widely used in sustainable land management schemes to identify important ecosystems and species to conserve, but is little known in academia and the scientific evidence base is lacking.

The policy paper encourages new research into the effectiveness of the HCV process and greater knowledge exchange between scientists, HCV users and policy makers, to reduce biodiversity losses from tropical landscapes. The paper is published in the journal *Conservation Letters*.

In tropical regions, agricultural expansion of crops, such as oil palm, and unsustainable logging are causing widespread habitat and biodiversity loss. A number of certification schemes have been developed in an attempt to halt these biodiversity losses, and promote more sustainable farming such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)and forestry such as Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) practices.

Certification schemes, such as the RSPO and FSC, often rely on the HCV approach to identify and maintain important environmental and social values in forestry management areas or oil palm plantations. These values —HCVs—include populations of threatened plants and animals, unique habitats, and areas used by traditional communities for

subsistence activities such as fishing. Companies seeking certification through schemes such as the FSC or RSPO must identify and maintain any HCVs within their management units.

The paper outlines the widespread use of the HCV approach in sustainable agricultural and forestry systems, and its potential role in protecting the unique biodiversity of tropical countries while highlighting the small scale of scientific research into its effectiveness. The paper calls for new research, and collaboration between scientists and the policy makers and companies using the HCV approach, to ensure that tropical biodiversity is protected.

Lead author, Dr Mike Senior, who carried out his PhD in the Department of Biology at York and now works for Proforest, says: "This paper was the result of a two-month internship with Proforest, my PhD CASE partner. The internship provided a fantastic opportunity to learn about some of the practical challenges facing sustainable tropical agriculture and forestry, and to discuss the role of research in addressing these challenges. From a personal perspective, the internship gave me experience of working with the private and charitable sectors, and made me appreciate the importance of collaboration for increasing the impact and wider relevance of research."

Co-author Professor Jane Hill, who was one of Mike Senior's PhD supervisors, says: "Loss of tropical biodiversity is a huge global challenge and stopping it requires collaboration between scientists, policy makers and companies. Too often, organisations doing on-the-ground conservation struggle to keep up to date with the latest conservation research and evidence, and scientists are frequently unaware of the practical challenges facing real-world conservation."

Co-author Paulina Villalpando, who was Mike Senior's supervisor at Proforest adds: "A third of the world's land surface is covered by

agriculture. The HCV approach is commonly used for biodiversity conservation in both tropical and temperate, agricultural and forestry systems, and has the potential to make a huge contribution to protecting biodiversity. Collaboration between scientists and organisations using the HCV approach is crucial to help scientists understand the practical challenges that land managers face, and to allow researchers to communicate their findings."

More information: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 … /conl.12148/abstract

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