

Madagascar's palm trees at risk of extinction

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An environmental group said Wednesday that a vast swath of Madagascar's unique palm tree species was threatened with extinction. Their dying out would harm the livelihoods of local people as well as endanger several animal species.

The International Union for [Conservation of Nature](#) said the palms were an integral part of Madagascar's biodiversity. All of the 192 species assessed are unique to the island. The IUCN said 83 percent of the palms on the Indian Ocean island are at risk because of over logging and because land is being cleared for farming.

The finding by IUCN experts was part of an ongoing assessment of all palms. It was released at a biodiversity conference in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad.

"The figures on Madagascar's palms are truly terrifying, especially as the loss of palms impacts both the unique biodiversity of the island and its people," Jane Smart, the global director of the IUCN Biodiversity [Conservation Group](#), said in a statement.

The palm forests provide resources to some of Madagascar's poorest communities, including materials for the construction of homes as well as edible palm hearts.

William Baker, the head of the IUCN expert group studying the palm forests, said palm areas in the island's eastern rain forests have already been reduced to less than one quarter of their original size and which

continue to disappear.

He said the decline in those forests "threatens all of the remarkable wildlife that occurs there."

The IUCN statement said [conservationists](#) had to work with local communities to protect the palm habitats and harvest seeds.

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