



SRI LANKA

population: **20 million**
capital: **Colombo**
total land area: **6,463,000 ha**

primary forest 1990: **257,000 ha**
primary forest 2005: **167,000 ha (2.58% of land)**
primary forest lost 1990-2005: **90,000 ha (-3.05%)**

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Rainforest Rescue International and Rainforest Concern

by Robin Lock, Advisor Rainforest Rescue International, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's rainforests are amongst the top 10 biodiversity hotspots in the World, though the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka rainforest region is also identified as a region where the biodiversity is under the highest pressure by agriculture in the World. The number of oil palm plantations and tea estates has increased drastically, and are even starting to encroach upon the protected Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

In 1997, against this backdrop of increasing deforestation and agricultural development, Dr Ranil Senanayake discussed with Peter Bennett of Rainforest Concern, a programme to conserve, protect and rebuild the rainforests of Sri Lanka by creating a bufferzone and corridor project around the two biggest remaining rainforest patches of Sri Lanka; Sinharaja Forest Reserve and Kanneliya Forest Reserve. In 2002, Dr Senanayake set up Rainforest Rescue International as the first Sri Lankan Rainforest Conservation NGO for 15 years. This was followed in June 2004 by the establishment of the Custodian Rainforest Trust of Sri Lanka, a fully-fledged charity organisation seeking full parliamentary approval, to ensure that any lands purchased are secured indefinitely as rainforest conservation areas. All land purchases are made by the Rainforest Trust, and all conservation projects are managed, funded and run by Rainforest Rescue International.

Whilst the creation of these two rainforest conservation organisations is a major achievement in itself, the increase of active



The indigenous tree nursery at Badulla

rainforest conservation and education activities in the area have also inspired a great deal of interest from the local communities. The presence of these two organisations has been noted by both the Sri Lankan government and international NGO's for their positive efforts and we are starting to get increasingly more support as a result.

Rainforest Rescue International was one of the first NGO's to get permission from the Sri Lankan government to collect seeds from the Sinharaja Forest Reserve and in 2002, we set up an indigenous tree nursery at Badulla, growing 7 endangered and endemic Dipterocarp species along with 46 other indigenous tree species. Rainforest Concern secured the first year of running costs and, adjacent to the nursery, supported the purchase of 4 acres of land and the building of an Education Centre for School children, due to be completed in March 2006. The tree nursery is now self sufficient, producing more than 100,000 plants over several rotations in the last year, which have already been distributed across different reforestation projects.

The Rainforest Trust has since purchased a further piece of land (6.4 acres) next to the Gin Ganga (Gin River) adjacent to Kanneliya and the proposed Hiniduma Forest Reserve as the first land bought for the new corridor project between Sinharaja and Kaneelliya Forest Reserves, mainly consisting of secondary forest. In September

2005 we began the programme of reforestation for this area, planting indigenous and endemic forest species cultivated in the new nursery, to attract animals like the flying squirrel, the giant squirrel, civets, wild boar, etc. The biggest group of animals endangered in Sri Lanka's rainforest are the reptiles, endemic flora and the fresh water fish, closely followed by the insects. Tragically Sri Lanka's Rainforest Elephants have totally disappeared from the wild and no longer populate the remaining forest areas.

To date, through the Rainforest Trust, Rainforest Concern has helped to fund the purchase and maintenance of over 16 acres of land between Sinharaja and Kanneliya Forest Reserves which is the start of a full programme in that region to create a bio-diversity corridor.

Finally, we would like to thank Rainforest Concern for it's financial assistance after the tsunami, which struck the area near our offices in the southern Sri Lankan city of Galle on Boxing day of 2004 with devastating effect. Rainforest Concern was the first organisation to commit itself to environmental relief work, pledging funds without delay to help rebuild offices and homes that were destroyed and to support school nutrients programmes at schools totally devastated by the tsunami.

Rainforest Rescue International continue to work at national levels and at the village level to increase awareness of some of the few remaining rainforest areas around the district of Galle, highlighting the need for conservation and protection of these threatened eco systems. We have initiated a two-year programme for the further creation of small nurseries and indigenous woodlands at secondary schools in the corridor area, and are actively promoting conservation education.



Sri Lanka's Rainforest Elephants have totally disappeared from the wild

The trustees of the Rainforest Trust of Sri Lanka are grateful to Rainforest Concern and all your members for your ongoing support and hope that we can do much more together in the years to come.



Forest cleared for tea plantations near to the Kanneliya Forest Reserve

photos: ROBIN LOCK