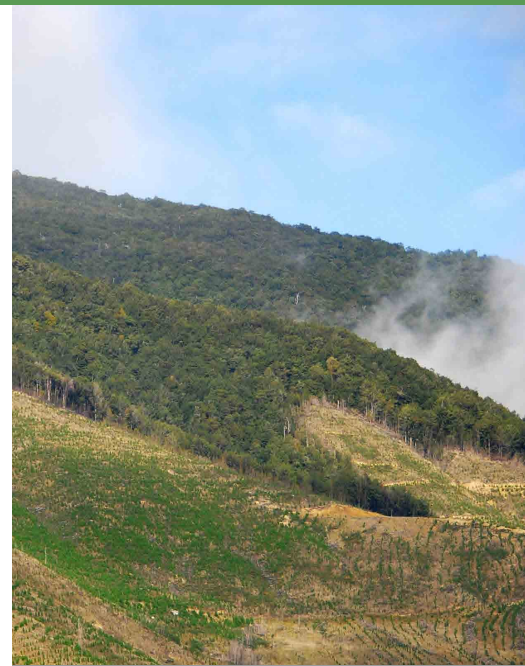




Deforestation

Forests are essential to life on Earth and cover around 30% of the global land area (FAO 2015). They shelter a large part of the biodiversity and play a major role in CO2 fixation.

The main cause of deforestation is the conversion of forests to land agricultural. Historically, the forest first disappeared in northern countries, but now it is the tropical forests that are threatened.



Deforestation in Tasmania, Martin Wegmann

A very old practice

Prehistoric man lived in, or very close to, the forest which covered all continents. Hunters: gatherers, men lived resources it provided them: animals, plants, wild fruits and berries. The destruction of forests, especially by fire, began in the Neolithic with the discovery of agriculture, practically at the same time in several regions of the world: Middle East and surroundings of the Mediterranean, China, Mexico... To have arable land, men burn and cleared, but in a limited way on the scale of the populations at the time.

This process will increase over the centuries, particularly in the Middle Ages in Europe with the clearing monks who will push back the wooded areas benefit from crops and meadows. At the time of Charlemagne (11th century), more than 1000 monastic communities settle in the woods and participate in large clearings. Peasants join the clearing monks and the crops expand to the detriment of the forest, to the point that at the start of the war Hundred Years ago (14th century), France was less wooded than today.

From the 16th to the 18th century in France, the forest was overexploited: shipbuilding, charcoal for metallurgy and support wood for mines iron and coal; forest area has fallen to less than 9 million of hectares. At the end of the 19th and 20th centuries, ambitious reforestations (Landes de Gascogne) will allow us to return to an area which is established today at 16 million hectares, or 29% of the national territory.

To remember

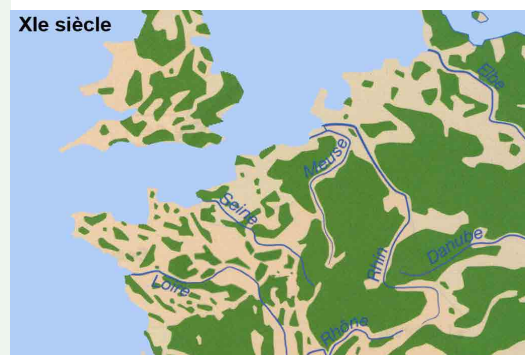
Since prehistoric times, wood has been a widely used material for heating, tool making and construction (houses, boats) but the first The cause of deforestation remains the need for land for cultivation and livestock.

Pierre de Ronsard in the 16th century took the defense of a forest in his region.

"Listen, lumberjack, stop your arm a little!
These are not woods that you throw down;
Don't you see the blood, which is dripping forcefully,
Nymphs that lived beneath the hard bark?
Murderous sacrilege, if a thief is hanged,
To plunder a booty of little value,
How many fires, irons, deaths and distresses
Do you deserve, villain, to kill our goddesses? "

"Against the loggers of the Gastine forest"

Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585)



Clearings, Alexandrin



An acceleration in modern times

Contemporary deforestation varies greatly from one continent to another and has multiple causes.

The northern hemisphere

It is the Mediterranean type regions, following fires, which are the most affected and which have seen their tree species disappear in favor of the maquis or scrubland.

This is evidenced by the very large fires in Portugal or Greece over the last decade and more recently in California, following very severe droughts and uncontrolled construction too close to wooded areas. We were able also note here and there an overexploitation of certain populations to supply the wood industries (paper mill).

Southern countries

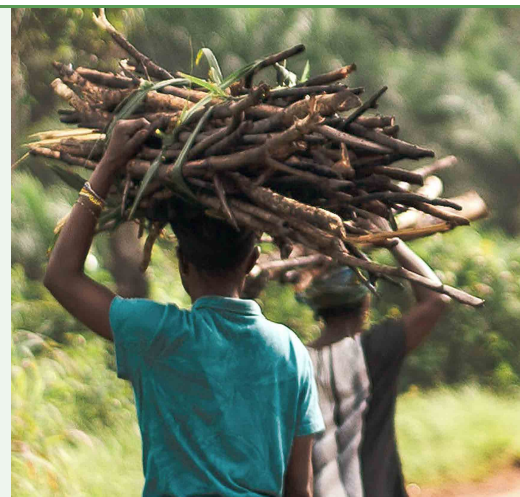
It is in the southern hemisphere that deforestation manifests itself in a dramatic way. This always originates from the inconsiderate action of men on their natural environment. We have thus been able to observe an overexploitation of forests in tropical areas for precious woods, for example in Thailand which saw the disappearance of species such as Tek.

What we call the fuelwood crisis is evident in many poor countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. The populations rural and sometimes peri-urban populations will harvest wood for cooking food, which is burned in very low efficiency stoves, or for charcoal production.

This wood collection is done without respecting the natural cycle of regeneration of the wood. These eventually disappear, giving way to degraded territories, where overgrazing then leads to sterility of soils, unsuitable for any human activity (desertification phenomenon).

The destruction of forests to replace them with industrial crops intensive farming is currently the major cause of ecosystem degradation in the countries of the South. Traditionally, men set fire to the forest to establish arable land, in order to feed their loved ones, but the spaces concerned were limited.

Since the time of colonization, in Africa, Asia and South America, this same phenomenon is developing on a very large scale to cultivate export products: cocoa, coffee, tea, peanuts, pineapples...



Firewood, Annie Spratt



Deforestation, Matt Zimmerman



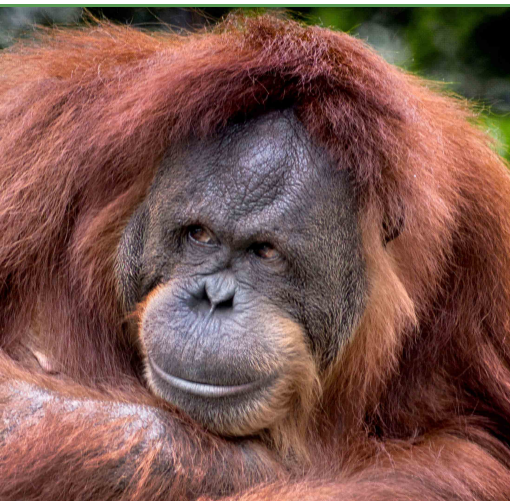
Tasmania, Martin Wegmann





Recent and dramatic examples

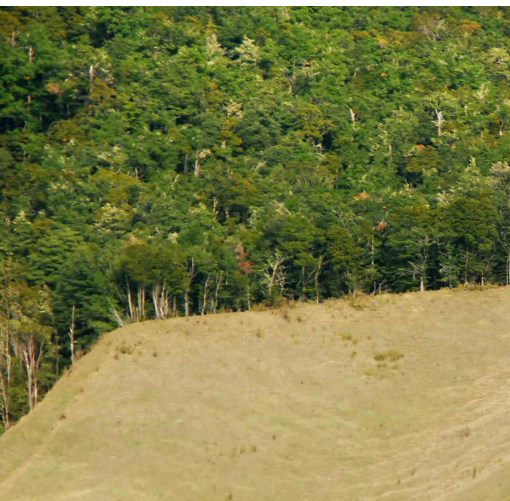
In all cases presented, humid forests and very diverse ecosystems sheltering a very wide variety of fauna wild and very rich flora, disappear. They are replaced by vast cultivated areas or by meadows, many poorer in terms of fauna and flora and sometimes by the desert.



Orangutan in Indonesia, Pxhere

In Indonesia and Malaysia, tropical rainforests are being destroyed and replaced by palm oil plantations. Indonesia has experienced during considerable fires over the last 30 years, 5 million hectares destroyed on the island of Borneo in 1983, i.e. the surface of Belgium, Luxembourg and from part of Holland. In 1998, the big companies probably deliberately caused enormous fires of around 10 million hectares to expand their oil palm plantations.

In Indonesia, a now well-known illustration of the extension of coconut oil palm to the detriment of the forest is the disappearance of the great apes (Orang-utan), following the destruction of their traditional habitat.



Deforestation, Martin Wegmann

The Brazilian Amazon is being ravaged to make way for extensive livestock farming or to soybean cultivation. The indigenous Amerindian populations who live in the forest are chased from their territory by agro-industrial companies and must take refuge further and further away, away from these new activities. The Amazon constitutes the largest reservoir of biodiversity in the world. The continued deforestation of this ecosystem would constitute one of the most major ecological disasters that could occur during the 21st century. What is very worrying is the risk of disappearance of the largest space tropical forest of the planet, with vast areas of primitive forests which have never been colonized by man.

Madagascar clearly illustrates the ecological disaster caused by deforestation. In the Malagasy island context, animal and plant species lived unique in the world; they disappeared in favor of the savannah, others were replaced by export crops; two thirds of Malagasy territory are today made up of poor soils dotted with scattered plants, or frankly naked.



Deforestation in the Amazon, Brazil © Google Earth

In Asia, the dispersion of forests is also considerable, due to pressure demographic. China has been destroying its forests since ancient times and has no longer only 8% of forest areas. Deforestation is also rampant in Australia which has only recently taken steps to protect its primeval forests from exceptional ecological importance.