

5.8 How can rainforests be conserved?

As people begin to realise the importance of rainforests, many have started to work towards preserving these valuable 'green dinosaurs'. Some methods of conservation are relevant only to governments and large companies, but some are relevant to you and the choices you make.

Rescue package 1: protect the remaining rainforests

While only six per cent of the world's rainforests are in a national park or reserve, there are many large areas of rainforest under protection. The number and size of these national parks are slowly increasing. The Korup National Park in Cameroon holds 126 000 hectares of Africa's richest untouched rainforest; the Khao Yai National Park in Thailand has 200 000 hectares, where the habitats of tigers, elephants and gibbons are protected; Costa Rica's rainforests are the most protected of all, with national parks and reserves covering almost one-third of that country.

Figure 1 The drill, one of Africa's most endangered primates, has a safe haven in the Korup National Park in Cameroon.



Rescue package 2: use the forest without destroying it

This is called **sustainable development**. It means that resources are taken from the rainforests but the forest remains largely intact. It has been estimated that a forest used this way is worth \$12 000 a hectare, while it is worth only \$300 a hectare if it is cleared for farming.

Timber users can now purchase timber from forests that are properly managed. A company in Mexico — the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) — assesses forests around the world. If the forests comply with regulations, the timber is given the FSC stamp. People who purchase that timber know the forest it came from is being responsibly managed.

Table 1 Countries with FSC-certified forests totalling more than 100 hectares

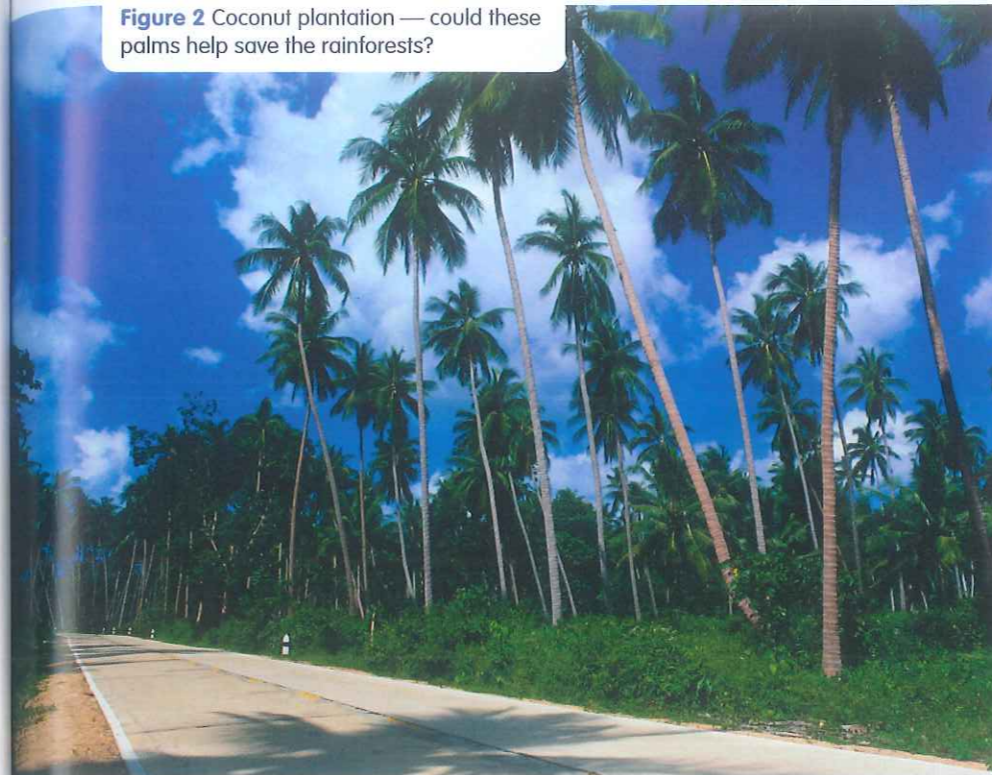
Country	Area of certified forest (hectares)
Bolivia	1 012 948
Brazil	1 463 718
Canada	4 253 822
Chile	376 364
Croatia	1 988 480
Germany	524 532
Guatemala	469 226
Indonesia	90 240
Ireland	438 000
Mexico	565 327
New Zealand	717 027
Poland	6 186 018
Russia	1 395 479
South Africa	1 496 970
Sweden	10 311 603
United Kingdom	1 144 386
United States	3 832 247
Zimbabwe	127 285

Rescue package 3: use alternative timber

One further step is not to use rainforest timber at all. Many rainforest trees are now grown in plantations, and alternatives such as using steel beams in houses and recycled paper in cardboard help take the strain off the rainforests.

One alternative that has been developed is the processing of old coconut palms to create hardwood. The company that is developing this resource, Tangaloo, claims that there are enough non-productive coconut palms to produce timber equivalent to one million rainforest trees. If this concept proves popular, plantations of coconut palms could be grown specifically for this purpose.

Figure 2 Coconut plantation — could these palms help save the rainforests?



Rescue package 4: act now!

While most of us do not have rainforests growing in our backyards, the choices we make each day can and do make a difference to the way resources are used around the world. There are many organisations that aim to conserve the world's remaining rainforests. Some of their suggestions are:

- use less wood and paper
- write to businesses that destroy the rainforest
- educate yourself about the importance of rainforests
- look for alternatives to rainforest products
- be an **ecotourist** — visit rainforests where your tourist dollars go towards education and conservation.

Activities

REMEMBER

- 1 What percentage of the world's rainforests are in national parks or reserves?
- 2 Which country has the most protected rainforests?
- 3 How are rainforest **environments** in Costa Rica protected?
- 4 Explain in your own words what the FSC does to help protect the rainforest **environment**.

EXPLAIN

- 5 List two advantages and two disadvantages of each rescue package. Which of the four packages do you think offers the most hope for rainforest conservation and **sustainability**? Explain why.
- 6 Why is it good to have a variety of action options?

DISCOVER

- 7 On a countries outline map of the world, shade in those countries with FSC-certified forests of over 100 000 hectares. Use lighter shades of one colour for countries with smaller areas of certified forest (such as 100 000–150 000 and 150 000–200 000 hectares), and darker shades of the same colour for countries with larger areas (250 000–500 000; 500 000–1 000 000; > 1 000 000 hectares). This type of map is called a choropleth map.

- 8 Other methods to help conserve the world's rainforests include:

- breeding endangered rainforest animals in captivity, and then releasing them
- providing websites where sponsors can give money to buy some rainforest and put it into a reserve
- employing indigenous rainforest people to pick nuts and berries or even to breed butterflies for collectors.

Use the internet to find an example of each of these methods and list any others that you find while completing this research. Document your findings.

- 9 Design your own website encouraging people to donate money to save the rainforest **environment**.

ecotourist a tourist who travels to threatened ecosystems in order to help preserve them
sustainable development economic development that causes a minimum of environmental damage, thereby protecting the interest of future generations



Protecting or plundering rainforests

Use this interactivity to decide whether or not various strategies protect rainforests.

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