

Forests, people and wildlife

*U*nasylva celebrates 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity, by examining strategies for the successful cohabitation of forests, people and wildlife. This issue addresses the challenges of balancing conservation and use of plant and animal biodiversity in forest settings, particularly where people's livelihoods or species survival are at stake.

The first article, by E. Kaeslin and D. Williamson, summarizes some of the main issues and challenges to be considered in managing forests and wildlife so that both they and people benefit. Topics considered include threats to forests and forest wildlife from overuse and uncontrolled trade; human-wildlife conflict; the potential and risks of ecotourism; and the challenges of integrating conservation and development.

Especially in Africa, the increasing proximity of people and wildlife has multiplied the losses of life and property due to human-wildlife conflict. A short contribution introduces a toolkit developed by FAO and partners in southern Africa to assist villagers in selecting appropriate solutions according to the case.

S. Nguiffo and M. Talla analyse the ineffectiveness of wildlife law in Cameroon, attributing the frequent violations to the law's failure to recognize adequately the contribution of local customs to sustainable wildlife resource management. The article emphasizes the contradictions in a law that encourages wildlife safaris and sport hunting as a source of revenue for the State, but prohibits traditional hunting practices that are fundamental to local livelihoods and culture.

The next articles explore aspects of community involvement in biodiversity conservation. E.K. Alieu, drawing mostly on examples from Sierra Leone, underlines the value of incorporating traditional knowledge and practice in conservation strategies. He emphasizes that involving communities in conservation is the best way to obtain their support for it.

Rawee Thaworn, L. Kelley and Y. Yasmi present an example from Thailand where the creation of a national park prevented local communities from carrying out their livelihood activities. In this case exclusion – the more traditional paradigm for protecting biodiversity – resulted in serious conflict between villagers and park authorities. The authors describe the negotiation process that eventually succeeded in defusing the situation and restoring some of the villagers' rights to use the resources. This not only fostered the villagers' survival, but also encouraged them to become active promoters of protection measures.

Nepal has extensive experience in community conservation

approaches. T.B. Khatri presents one of the solutions adopted to balance conservation and people's livelihoods in Nepal's protected areas: buffer zones where sustainable use of natural resources is permitted and a portion of revenue from protected area management (particularly tourism) is reinvested in local development.

In South Africa, the end of apartheid created a particular situation for devolving forest management, with previously appropriated land now being returned to its rightful owners. M.A.I. de Koning describes a model developed to negotiate co-management agreements for land restitution in protected areas. The viability of co-management is first evaluated based on the area's biodiversity and tourism value.

Ecotourism is a relatively new concept for bringing together forests, people and wildlife in beneficial ways. It can raise people's awareness of conservation needs and offer sustainable livelihood opportunities in rural areas. A. Bien explains its growth and particular success in Costa Rica, also noting the risks to be considered in developing policy to promote ecotourism. Next, a short piece describes a novel form of ecotourism: canopy walks, which although originally developed for research, now make it possible for all kinds of people, in all regions, to explore the forests from high above the ground.

Finally, L. Miles and B. Dickson examine the outlook for biodiversity conservation in the context of the global climate change negotiations. They outline how REDD-plus – actions on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, including conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks and sustainable management of forest – can be planned in such a way as to promote biodiversity benefits while combating climate change.

Additional shorter pieces highlight FAO's "One health" approach to animal health, which considers the connectivity among ecosystems, wildlife, livestock and people in addressing emerging disease threats; the merits of edible insects; building local capacity to implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for timber species; and a project in Switzerland that provides opportunities for volunteers – including corporate employees – to do hands-on forest maintenance work, with benefits for both the forests and the volunteers.

*U*ntil recent decades, the main strategy for conserving forest biodiversity was to keep people out of the forest. There will always be cases where strict protection is necessary, but as the articles in this issue demonstrate, allowing local people, and sometimes tourists, to use and appreciate the resources may be a better way to ensure their conservation. Only those solutions that carefully balance varied interests, and that integrate (rather than separate) resource use and conservation, will be sustainable.