

EATEN AWAY

From one side the forest is destroyed by hunters with fire, from another side, the commercial loggers with big machines and lorries come to carry the wood all over the world, and on the third side, farmers swing at the trees with their axes, making a living from the soil beneath. All of these people need the forest. All are contributing to its loss. Although it can seem endless, one day there will be no more forest.

Africa loses over 5 million hectares of forest every year

By taking photographs from the sky, remote sensing and satellite imagery, scientists have been able to work out how much forest is left in Africa. While large resplendent forests remain in Central Africa, particularly in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo, they are under threat. In forty years, two thirds of Gabon's ancient forests have been destroyed by man. In Uganda, forests used to cover half of the country. Now they cover only 21%. As roads are built by loggers, humans move in and clear the remaining forest. Around 10 km² of rain forest disappear for each kilometre of new road built.

Why are the forests cleared? We chop them for firewood, for farming, to graze livestock, build houses or sell the timber. Just like with fish and wildlife populations, trees need to be able to reproduce and grow to adulthood at least as quickly as they are chopped down. Otherwise the trees disappear. It is tempting to clear fell (chop all the trees down) or burn the



forest to farm the land beneath. While this can provide for today, tomorrow may be lean again. The trouble is that African soils are quite fragile. Under the forest, the soil is made and maintained by the trees. When the trees are removed, quite quickly the soil is lost. Soon, farming cannot continue. If there is a way, it can be better to make use of the standing forest, exploiting its many resources, without damaging them.

