

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 axes (and chainsaws) to make a living from the soil beneath.

Africa loses over 3 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 and the Republic of Congo, they are under threat. In just 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 it's one fifth. As roads are built by loggers, humans move in and clear the adjacent forest. Around 10 square kilometres of rain forest disappear for each kilometre of new road.

Why are the forests cleared? We chop them for firewood, for farming crops, for plantations, to build houses, factories, or to harvest and sell the timber. As with fish and wildlife populations, trees need to reproduce and grow to adulthood at least as quickly as they are chopped down. If not the forest disappears.

It is tempting to clear fell, to chop all the trees down or burn the forest to farm the land beneath. While this can provide for today, it will leave our children struggling.

In harsh climates soils are fragile and take hundreds of years to develop. Under the forest, soil is protected from erosion and continuously replenished with organic matter from leaves, dead branches and other organic matter. When trees are removed, quite quickly the soil is lost - and farming cannot continue.

