

TITLE: Dry Forests of New Caledonia

LOCATION/Geography:



New Caledonia is a Melanesian island in the western Southern Pacific. It is considered to be one of the most important regions of the world in terms of biodiversity and endemism.

BACKGROUND

The island is a treasure of biodiversity. Isolated for millions of years, it has come to have one of Earth's most unusual and highly distinctive biological communities. More than 2,500 of its known 3,400 native plant species are unique to this island. Among a large panel of habitats existing there, tropical dry forests are particularly remarkable for their richness in primitive and unique higher species (classified as one of global 200 ecoregion). However, tropical dry forests are critically endangered and may disappear in the next few years if no conservation measures are undertaken.



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PROBLEM/THREAT:

The dry tropical forests of New Caledonia are under threat from fire, clearance for agriculture and the introduction of exotic species.

Only tiny patches, a mere 2 percent of the original forest cover, remain. Moreover the largest fragments measure 300 hectares. Such small patches pose a high risk to the overall ability of the dry forests to sustain their key ecological processes across the island, including specifically habitat for species.

WWF's ACTION

For the past two years, WWF has worked with institutions, scientists and other partners to develop an integrated strategy for the conservation and development of this remarkable ecosystem. The objective of this project is to raise awareness among the population, decision-makers and the elected representatives of New Caledonia about both the cultural value and the economic potential of dry tropical forests. In addition, steps will be taken at local level to prevent and reduce threats, as well as to strengthen the capacity of the local population to sustainably manage their natural heritage.

WWF is working in New Caledonia as a key technical partner alongside 8 local partners.

The main measures that will be undertaken to restore the dry tropical forests of New Caledonia are the following:

- Increase the number of species in the forest, and preserve the seeds;
- Establish the appropriate means for combating pests, targeting in particular invasive plants and invertebrates;
- Identify and protect potential 'biological corridors'; linking several patches of protected forest encourages regeneration and natural reforestation;
- Replanting of target areas, and the creation of tree nurseries;
- Encourage natural regeneration through appropriate forestry policies as well as targeted and regular upkeep;
- Put in place efficient fire prevention mechanisms, in particular through the training of staff and land planning.

In addition, this program has been promoting exchanges of experiences with other dry forest regions such as Madagascar, Vietnam, Mexico and Costa Rica.