



On the Edge: The State and Fate of the World's Tropical Rainforests

Claude Martin

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Refocusing attention on tropical rain forests, Martin's exposé reveals the extent to which these forests are impacted by climate change.

On the Edge: The State and Fate of the World's Tropical Rainforests is the 34th report to the Club of Rome, an NGO think tank whose conservation recommendations play a major role in the global environmental movement. This is peer-reviewed science that “contributes vital new elements to an important global debate.”

Claude Martin, a Swiss biologist and wildlife ecologist, was the CEO of the World Wildlife Federation from 1993-2005 and is currently the chancellor of International University in Geneva. His report on the current state of tropical rain forests covers expected topics—deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and climate change—however, Martin takes these topics into a nuanced realm, explaining concepts like “cover change,” “forest fragmentation,” and “carbon storage.” Such concepts are couched within the larger problem of delivery in non-English-speaking countries—and inversely, especially with African languages, not being well understood among English-speaking scientists.

Martin consults eight experts who contribute their views on specific issues. The book combats what the author calls “rainforest fatigue,” the waning interest by some conservation organizations in tropical rain forests in the face of media attention on climate change, and centers the focus on the organizations’ crucial role in the global ecosystem.

The main culprit driving rain-forest destruction is one many environmentalists have heard before. As global population increases, the United Nations predicts a 60 percent increase in agricultural products worldwide between 2015 and 2016. Dietary changes accompanying this increase are resulting in “the rapid increase of meat and palm oil consumption in emerging economies. The world may literally eat up the tropical rainforests.”

In a section outlining “seventeen key messages for the future,” Martin details four areas of focus needed for rain-forest preservation that address his assertion that “the many individual deforestation drivers” are not the primary threat to the forests. Rather, “the fatal interactions between these threats amplify the risks and could mean the almost complete disappearance of intact tropical rainforests in the twenty-first century.” Though a dire prediction, Martin’s message includes hope, outlined in a multi-stakeholder approach to the “conservation of intact tropical rainforests and their biodiversity as well as the survival of indigenous forest communities.”

KAI WHITE (Summer 2015)

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