

## **FOREST: THE LUNGS OF THE LIVING PLANET (or should that be its air conditioner?)**

This article is about a vitally important feature of our planet: the trees.

Forests - especially tropical rainforests like the Amazon - are sometimes called the “lungs of the planet”. This is because, to make their food and grow, they usually draw in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen. The science is complicated, but the main effect in the atmosphere is that forests (along with the oceans) absorb large amounts of carbon dioxide which trees store in their trunk, branches and so on. This carbon storage helps to cool the planet – so it might be more accurate to liken forests to the planet’s air conditioning system. It’s just one example of how the different parts of God’s amazing creation work together harmoniously to enable life on earth.

This means that trees and forests play a vital role in helping solve the problem of global warming. As the UN’s environment, development and agriculture chiefs said in a joint 2018 statement “forests are a major, requisite front of action in the global fight against catastrophic climate change – thanks to their unparalleled capacity to absorb and store carbon. Stopping deforestation and restoring damaged forests could provide up to 30 percent of the climate solution.”

Unfortunately deforestation continues at an alarming rate, often caused by forest fires, logging, mining and clearance for agriculture and development. It has been estimated that an area of forest the size of the UK is lost every year. The situation is very serious, but there is hope. The greatest rate of forest loss happened in the 1990s and has slowed considerably since then. The importance of forests is being recognised more widely. Deforestation will be one of the topics addressed at COP26 (the United Nations Climate Change Conference) scheduled to take place in Glasgow later this year. Before then we will have opportunity to add our voices to those of other Christians encouraging our government to provide strong leadership – and to lead by example – at the conference.

There are many wonderful small and large scale projects to protect existing forests and create new ones, and we can support these with our prayers and

donations. Last year this church donated £300 to Green Christian's Rainforest Fund, supporting World Land Trust, Cool Earth and A Rocha International, three charities working to protect forests and other natural habitats.

Other ways we can help protect forest include making responsible shopping choices, such as buying forestry products that bear the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) label and signing petitions or writing letters in support of forest protection. Our small contributions, added together, can make a real difference.

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