# Are tropical forests really disappearing?

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Evidence that the world's tropical forests are shrinking may not be as clear-cut as previously thought, according to a leading deforestation expert who has trawled through decades of UN data.

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Dr Alan Grainger, senior geography lecturer at the University of Leeds, spent three years examining global tropical forest datasets collected by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and found no evidence to suggest that, as a whole, forest cover is decreasing. His results indicate that while there is plenty of local evidence of deforestation, the bigger picture may have been distorted by flawed data.

'The errors and inconsistencies I have discovered in the area data raise too many questions to provide convincing support for the accepted picture of tropical forest decline over the last 40 years,' he said. 'The picture is far more complicated than previously thought. If there is no long-term net decline, it suggests that deforestation is accompanied by a lot of natural reforestation that we have not spotted.'

Grainger has been campaigning for the implementation of regular scientific monitoring of the world's tropical forests, including the establishment of a 'world forest observatory', which, he argues, is the only way we can track long-term forest extent accurately.

'What is happening to the tropical forests is so important, both to the peoples of tropical countries and to future trends in biodiversity and global climate, that we can no longer put off investing in an independent scientific monitoring programme that can combine satellite and ground data to give a reliable picture', he said.

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