

Forest Restoration for Wildlife Conservation

A Workshop to Develop a Research Agenda to Restore Southeast Asia's Seasonally Dry Tropical Forests, January 30 – February 4, 2000, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

More than 100 people from 14 different countries gathered in Chiang Mai to discuss a wide range of scientific and social factors that affect forest restoration. The workshop was organized by Vilaiwan Anusarnsunthorn and Steve Elliott along with the energetic staff of FORRU (Forest Restoration Research Unit, Chiang Mai, Thailand). Unknown to probably most of the international scientific community, there is a small but highly motivated group of individuals restoring forests in Southeast Asia; and thus virtually every country in the region was represented with the exception of Laos and Cambodia, whose representatives were unable to attend.

The stated objectives of the workshop were:

1. To prepare an agenda for the advancement of research on forest restoration for wildlife conservation in Southeast Asia's seasonally dry tropical forests.
2. To establish a protocol for the exchange of information on forest restoration research throughout Southeast Asia.

These objectives were achieved by dividing participants into three small discussion groups, which simultaneously considered each main workshop topic, following the plenary papers presented by local, national, and international experts. Broad topics covered included assisted natural regeneration, species selection and techniques for planting, the relationship between wildlife and restoration, and methods of working with local communities. The discussion groups were provided with sets of guiding questions to help them to i) identify gaps in knowledge concerning each of the main workshop topics, ii) prioritize the most important areas requiring urgent research, and iii) suggest outline research proposals. Discussion group chairpersons presented the research suggestions from each group to the whole assembly for feedback. A total of 136 specific research questions were suggested for further study. On the final day of the workshop, participants were asked to nominate 10 topics they considered were the most important and 3 requiring further research most urgently. The most important topics that the majority of workshop participants nominated for urgent attention were i) plantation design (species composition, size, positioning, etc.), ii) seed dispersal, and iii) fire management. Because it was made clear to everyone that there are biases inherent in ranking research priorities by simple vote, detailed research proposals have been compiled in the forthcoming workshop proceedings (Elliott et al., in press) to cover all those topics that gained strong consensus across all groups, as well as those nominated as urgent and/or important by the voting process. Interestingly, the priorities derived from the discussion sessions were remarkably similar. Given the diversity of backgrounds and viewpoints of the entire group, one could only conclude that genuine consensus had been reached.

The workshop also focused on the seasonally dry tropical forests characteristic of this region, rather than the tropical rain forests. Tropical rain forests are known for their high

biological diversity and consequently have attracted attention of researchers and the public. However, recent evidence suggests that seasonally dry tropical forests can be nearly as diverse as tropical rain forests (Elliott *et al.*, 1989) and they may be more endangered than tropical rain forests (Janzen, 1988). Furthermore, seasonally dry tropical forests present unique challenges for restoration, of which annual drought and frequent fires are the most serious.

The meeting was more productive than any similar workshop I have attended in the past. By concentrating on the technical and scientific aspects of forest restoration for wildlife conservation in Southeast Asia's seasonally dry tropical forests, the workshop avoided repeating what other workshops and symposia had already covered and promoted a new area of scientific discovery for many of the countries in the region. Because the workshop was highly focused, there was by necessity less public participation; however, through contributions of several sponsors (International Tropical Timber Organization, International Union of Forestry Research Organizations, The British Council, Chiang Mai University, the Thai Biodiversity Research and Training Program, and Shell International Renewables Ltd.), researchers and practitioners who probably could not normally afford to attend such international meetings due to financial constraints were represented in significant numbers. The first day of the workshop was open to the public and was well attended, owing to local and regional interest and the relatively modest attendance fee.

Although presentations were not as academically oriented as in strictly scientific symposia, the workshop reflected the state of the art and science of forest restoration in this region. I think most of us left the workshop with an increased sense of optimism and that reversing the trend of deforestation is possible in the developing world through the use of science, education, and community participation.

For a copy of the proceedings please contact FORRU, Department of Biology, Faculty of Science, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand; e-mail: scplrn@chiangmai.ac.th

REFERENCES

- ELLIOTT, S., J. MAXWELL, AND O. BEAVER. 1989. A transect survey of monsoon forest in Doi Suthep-Pui National Park. *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.* 37(2):137-171.

George Gale

School of Bioresources and Technology
Division of Natural Resources Management
King Mongkut's University of Technology
Thonburi