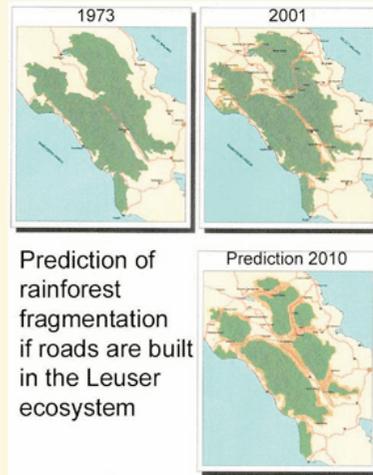


## Other news from Sumatra

June 2002

Indonesia still contains some large tracts of pristine tropical rainforest, with an abundance of mammal, bird, reptile and plant life. The Leuser Ecosystem, approximately two million hectares in extent, is the only place on the planet where Sumatran orangutans, tigers, elephants, rhinoceroses and clouded leopards can be found together. Other wildlife includes the sun bear, slow loris, jungle rabbit, gibbons, monkeys and countless reptile, amphibian, bird and plant species, many of which are highly endangered.

The area consists mostly of forested mountain slopes, but also contains lowland forests, swamp forests, rivers, lakes, and two major volcanoes. Orangutans are mostly found in the swampy and lowland forest. The rainforest is of great importance to many local people, and unoccupied primary forest is considered sacred according to traditional beliefs.



In recent years, logging and poaching in the Leuser Ecosystem has decimated vast tracts. At present only about one third of the Leuser Ecosystem has been designated as a protected area. However, even the protected Gunung Leuser National Park has been severely damaged by illegal incursion. One conservation organisation, the [Leuser Development Programme](#) (LDP), funded by the European Union, is campaigning for the park to be extended and for effective law enforcement to protect the forest. Their programmes include working with local people to reduce their dependence upon unsustainable forest exploitation, and to encourage their embrace of the benefits of maintaining the forest, including lasting water, soil fertility, local climate regulation, flood control, and the potential of eco-tourism in some places.

These projects are being jeopardised by a new plan to build several roads across the Leuser ecosystem, linking the province of Aceh to Sumatra Utara. At present only one major road exists dissecting the forest, and this has already caused an influx of loggers and poachers into the heart of the forest. The LDP team predicts that if the road-building project is implemented, the resultant logging will fragment the forest into nine unconnected areas by 2010. This will mean that many creatures are isolated in ever diminishing areas where future viability is in doubt. At the same rate of deforestation, it will not be long before the entire forest has vanished.

The project is being pushed forwards by the Acehnese authority, despite opposition from Indonesia's central government. LDP is lobbying potential funders to reconsider their role in this project, and is petitioning authorities in Aceh to abandon the plan, citing the potentially catastrophic effects this would have on local communities, as well as on the Leuser's ecosystem's future. It is imperative that this project be stopped. S.O.S has offered to support LDP in an international campaign to prevent the road-building plan from being implemented. Please visit our [campaign page](#) for ways to help stop the road-building.

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