

The Guardian

Queen's jubilee tree planting sponsors 'linked to deforestation'

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The Queen's jubilee tree planting scheme has been sponsored by companies with links to deforestation, say campaigners.

Across the country, people have been asked to "plant a tree for the jubilee" in honour of the Queen's 70 years on the throne.

The Queen's Green Canopy scheme will dedicate a network of 70 ancient woodlands across the UK and identify 70 ancient trees to "celebrate Her Majesty's 70 years of service".

The move is aimed at reforesting the UK. However, concerns have been raised by a campaign group over some of the scheme's "platinum" sponsors, which are listed on the official website. These include McDonald's, which has been linked to deforestation in Brazil.

Another platinum sponsor is Coutts, the Queen's bank. As part of the NatWest group, Coutts invests in various companies that campaigners at the rewilding NGO Wild Card accuse of profiting from deforestation.

These include the power company Drax, which uses biomass for fuel. During 2021, the Drax power station in Yorkshire burned 7.7m tonnes of pellets made from freshly cut ("green") wood, but there are growing concerns about the sustainability of this practice.

NatWest also invests in the pulp mill UPM, which has been accused of causing deforestation in Uruguay by harvesting trees for paper. The energy company Vattenfall, which trades wood pellets and wood chips to energy companies, is also funded by the group.

Campaigners have accused the royal family of helping large corporations greenwash their environmental records.

Louisa Casson, head of forests for Greenpeace UK, said: "Sadly, the number of trees that this scheme might help to plant is a tiny fraction of the number the scheme's corporate sponsors have helped to destroy. It's an insult to the volunteers taking part to use their efforts to greenwash the reputations of companies that drive deforestation across the world."

Joel Scott-Halkes, a co-founder of Wild Card, added: "The royal family are helping major corporations greenwash their own planet-wrecking activities. As representatives of our nation, they are implicating us all in a shameful cover-up of these global companies' appalling environmental reputations."

"As the biggest landowning family in Britain, the royals should be using their time to rewild and reforest their own vast estates – not lending their name to companies like McDonald's."

Wild Card also criticised the scheme for awarding Rentokil platinum sponsorship, when the company advertises its services for the killing of winged insects, numbers of which have declined by 60% since 2004.

Emma Smart, campaigns coordinator at the NGO, said: "A company that profits from the extermination of bees, ants, moths, wasps and flies essential for survival of tree canopies, vital not just for nature but for humans also, is not just greenwash, it's ecocidal".

Rentokil said: "The type of work we undertake is helping customers to control flies inside food production or food preparation facilities, bed bugs in hotels, cockroaches in kitchens. We also work in parts of the world where mosquitoes cause malaria and zika [virus], with the associated serious impact on human health."

During her reign, the Queen has planted more than 1,500 trees all over the world, and her subjects have been asked to plant millions across the UK as a "special gift" for the jubilee celebrations.

However, her own land is relatively bereft of trees. The royal family owns over 850,000 acres (350,000 hectares) of land and foreshore, but many of their estates have less tree cover than other

parts of the UK. For example, the Duchy of Cornwall, owned by Prince Charles, has only 6% tree coverage compared with 16% UK-wide.

Balmoral, the Queen's estate in Scotland, would naturally be a temperate rainforest, but environment campaigners have pointed out that it contains large swathes of grouse moors, and only small fragments of woodland remain.

The crown estate manages a £14.1bn property portfolio, which includes Windsor Great Park and urban areas such as Regent Street in central London, as well as 264,000 acres of farmland, woods and uplands. An independent commercial business, it hands all its profits to the Treasury, which passes on 25% of profits – with a two-year time lag – to the Queen through the Sovereign Grant.

Campaigners have previously asked the crown estate to pledge to make space for nature – and potentially woodland – even if this would affect profits.

A spokesperson said: "The Queen's Green Canopy is very grateful to our platinum supporters who have helped to enable the planting of over a million trees in the UK since October 2021. Each company who has generously supported the QGC is committed to rigorous and challenging targets on both deforestation and biodiversity.

"As a charitable initiative which has not received taxpayers' funding, we are dependent on donors to achieve our objectives, which is to fund tree planting in areas of the greatest need across the UK.

"Through this support we will continue to plant significant numbers of trees in the autumn through until the end of the platinum jubilee year. The legacy of this campaign will make a difference for future generations and encourage tree planting for a long time into the future."

A spokesperson for McDonalds told the Guardian: "McDonald's is committed to eliminating deforestation from its global supply chains by 2030.

"2020 saw us reach a major milestone by achieving our goal of supporting deforestation-free supply chains for several of our primary ingredients and materials – beef, chicken (soy in feed), palm oil, coffee and the fibre used in customer packaging.

"We recognise that we have more work to do. That's why we are accelerating progress in this area and, as a signatory of the UK Soy Manifesto, are committing to sourcing soy, used both as an ingredient and in the animal feed across our supply chains, from deforestation-free supply chains by the end of 2025."

Natwest said it had identified biodiversity and nature loss as an emerging risk for the bank and was a forum member on the Taskforce on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures.

"Our private bank Coutts is proud to support the planting of trees in schools and deprived urban areas through the Queen's Green Canopy as part of its wider commitment to inspire tree planting across the UK and support young people to develop green skills and find employment."

A spokesperson for Drax disputed that they have links to deforestation, saying some forests they use have doubled in size since the 1950s, and 40% of the wood used in the pellets at Drax Power Station consists of waste (sawdust, chips and shavings from sawmills) or residues left behind after commercial cuts of timber for use in the likes of construction or furniture making.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/30/queens-jubilee-tree-planting-sponsors-linked-to-deforestation>