

The future of forest conservation goes digital

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With many countries in lockdown, conservationists are finding new ways to fight deforestation and support communities that live in tropical forest landscapes. BirdLife's Forest Landscape Sustainability Accelerator is back for 2020 and kicks things off at a ground-breaking digital conference

Despite the global pandemic, which has brought many of us to a halt, conservationists are continuing their vital work in tropical forest landscapes. Forest loss continues, and so we are putting renewed energy into tackling one of conservation's biggest problems: sustainable funding – even if it means more work from behind a computer.

BirdLife has had remarkable success in securing legal protection for vast and threatened forests, yet cutting-edge solutions are needed now more than ever to help alleviate pressure on forests in the long-term. This work involves a 'landscape approach', in which the competing demands for land-use (food, wildlife, livelihoods, restoration etc) must be balanced in a way that is best for the environment and human well-being – now, without compromising the future.

BirdLife Partners are working with communities in some of the world's most species-rich tropical forests. Working from project by project and reliant on funding, they have had great successes that benefit both nature and people, but there is a need to find new approaches that ensure forest conservation gets the long-lasting financial security it desperately needs.

In its second year, BirdLife's Forest Landscape Sustainability Accelerator, part of Trillion Trees, is trying to solve this big conservation challenge – looking at how we can create more sustainable, diversified funding models and grow ideas that ensure the future conservation of world's tropical forests.

From Paraguay to Indonesia, BirdLife Partners are developing the sales of forest-positive commodities (such as cocoa, rice, yerba mate, and candlenut) and carbon schemes – and the Accelerator is giving this work a long-term boost.



A forest-positive commodity, Mbeliling, Indonesia © Barend van Gemenen

Modelled on the methods used by start-up companies in the tech sector, an ‘accelerator’ provides a package of support and mentorship and acts as a hub and a matchmaker through which investors find new companies and promising investments. This enables people with big ideas to develop them in a supportive environment. Having successfully applied this to forest landscape conservation, in just one year, we are already seeing shifting regional business practices, potential changes to laws, and forest-positive products being shipped around the world.

This year (for obvious reasons) the interactive face-to-face workshops and crucial physical ‘pitch event’ that were planned for June in London cannot go ahead. This pioneering initiative is not fazed, however. “We are taking the Accelerator online to keep us learning, supported and financed in the short term, and it’s even opening doors to new opportunities”, says Katie Sims, co-organiser of the Accelerator. “We are ready to pitch innovative ideas and welcome investment.”

Rethinking food systems: the Global Landscapes Forum



A ground-breaking digital conference, the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF), is the first such opportunity. Held on the 3-5 June, the GLF will kickstart a global conversation on how to transform food systems to protect human well-being and planetary health in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

As part of the global drive to 'build back better,' the digital conference will convene leading voices to discuss how to feed a booming global population while preserving the ability of ecosystems to support human health and livelihoods in the long-term.

The Accelerator is hosting a session on 3 June, and invites you to join the conversation on the forest-positive future of food and livelihoods, showcasing BirdLife Partner work in Brazil, Paraguay, Indonesia and Cambodia, as well as the Accelerator model itself. Other interactive sessions and talks feature top experts from the science, business, journalism and policy-making fields, as well as community leaders and young entrepreneurs representing all stages of the food supply chain.

The GLF will harness the latest virtual conferencing platforms and techniques to ensure equitable inclusion and participation of anyone who wishes to join and help reimagine the future of food in response to the health, climate and biodiversity crises.

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