

What Should We Try to Learn About Tropical Biodiversity, and How Can We Use the Knowledge for Conservation?

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One of the most important steps to take in moving toward science-based conservation is gaining an understanding of what is already known, what data sets already exist, and sharing that information so that prioritized initiatives can be undertaken to fill in the most necessary gaps as quickly as possible because of the rapidity of the disappearance of undisturbed tropical ecosystems. Accomplishing this is of course fundamentally dependent on the open sharing of primary data so that if it is possible and they are applicable they can be used again and again for different studies leading to greater cost efficiency. As has been repeatedly noted, much data about the tropics resides in the temperate countries of the northern hemisphere, and so a global system for sharing the data is needed. To use the knowledge we have for conservation, that knowledge will need to become digital and be shared via a global network such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. Another important aspect of what we should try to learn about tropical biodiversity is that the studies should not be done without taking the human factors into account – much past research has focused on the organisms of the tropics as though there were no impending interactions with humans and yet we now know that there is virtually no place on Earth that is untouched by the activities of people, so it is important to include sociological elements in biological observations and experiments. The sociology of science itself needs to move toward more cooperative endeavors, which of course will be facilitated by today's capacities for open data sharing.