



Resilience of tropical forest offers hope

Large tracts of tropical forest are being sacrificed to agriculture. But when farming is abandoned again, the forest grows back within decades, shows an international study led by WUR forest ecologist Lourens Poorter. The study was published in *Science*.

Poorter and his team documented the growth of a large number of tracts of secondary forest in parts of Africa and Central and South America. Secondary forests are those that grow back after primary forest has been felled and the land used for farm-

The biodiversity recovers in 20 to 60 years

ing. Within 20 years, many of the characteristics of the original forests are restored to 80 per cent of what they were. This only happens, however, if the land has not been used for agriculture for too long, so the soil is still sufficiently intact.

Some of the forest's characteristics return sooner than others. The soil recovers almost entirely within a decade, while the wood and foliage characteristics recover within 25 years. It is not always the same species that grow, however. A full recovery to the forest's original state can take at least 120 years.

According to Poorter, the study underscores the importance of secondary forests for the recovery of biodiversity and achieving the climate targets. He therefore argues for a more proactive approach.

'Use natural forest restoration where possible, and plant where necessary. And agroforestry may be an excellent option when you do plant. We hope that a mix of approaches will help create more natural, biodiverse, healthy and resilient tropical landscapes.' RK