



# 9300 tree species still unknown

**It is an intriguing question for scientists: how many different species are there on the planet? The estimate for trees was 64,000 species until recently, but new calculations give a much higher number.**

The study was initiated by the Global Forest Biodiversity Initiative (GFBI). Professor Gert-Jan Nabuurs was one of the founders of the GFBI, which collects data on forests. According to Nabuurs, its database has information on more than 1.3 million forest plots, home to some 28,000 different species. But many parts of the world are not well represented.

Statistical methods were used to estimate the total number of tree species on the

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planet based on this and other databases.

The resulting estimate was

73,300 species,

which is 9300 more than was previously thought. According to Nabuurs, the figure shows how much biodiversity is as yet unknown. ‘The numbers are high even for organisms this big. What is more, there are only a few species that we know a lot about.’

## **Protect primeval forests**

Almost half the unknown species are in South America. That is hardly surprising as half the known species are found there too. Tropical rainforests are acknowledged hotspots for biodiversity. The importance of the study lies not so much in the figure itself, says Nabuurs. ‘It is about drawing attention to the wealth of species and showing which areas have most biodiversity. So we really need to protect the remaining primeval forests.’ RK