

Royal accolade for CIFOR scientist

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II presented Ravi Prabhu, CIFOR's regional coordinator for southern and eastern Africa, with the Queen's Award for Forestry on 24 February 2005 at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace. Prabhu was awarded the prize in recognition of his outstanding contribution to work on sustainable forest management, and especially his work on criteria and indicators (C&I). A forester by training, Prabhu joined CIFOR in 1994. He has played a leading role in CIFOR's Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) research. He recently served on the Task Force on Environmental Sustainability for the United Nations Millennium Project, established by Kofi Annan and led by Jeffrey Sachs.

Prabhu is the fourth person associated with CIFOR to win this prestigious award. The others were John Turnbull, Jerry Vanclay and Yemi Katerere, currently CIFOR's Assistant Director General.



The Queen's Award for Forestry was presented to Dr. Ravi Prabhu at Buckingham Palace on 24 February 2005. (Photo by Buckingham Palace Press Office)

Paving the way in Papua

The media frenzy which greeted the announcement, on 7 February 2005, that a team of scientists had discovered a veritable Noah's Ark of hitherto unknown species in a remote part of Indonesia was to be expected. Stories like this don't come round very often. The media concentrated on the stars of the story – 20 new species of frogs, four new butterflies, five new palms, the magnificently coloured Berlepsch's six-wired bird of paradise, and of course the scientists, funded by Conservation International (CI), who penetrated the Foja Mountains in Papua to discover 'a lost world'.

CIFOR also played a minor, though significant, role in this story. The year before the expedition, CIFOR scientists had been hired by CI to work in two villages in the Foja Mountains. 'CI realised that they couldn't operate in remote areas of Papua unless they worked closely with local people,' explains CIFOR ethnobotanist Manuel Boissière, who has spent many years working in Papua. 'If you go into these areas and fail to co-operate with the local people, you'll have a serious problem. They have a very strong notion of ownership, and they can be very physical with outsiders if they're unhappy.'

CIFOR scientists trained 16 students, lecturers and civil servants from Papua, together with two CI staff, how to conduct multidisciplinary landscape assessments, a technique which acknowledges the central role local people play in the management of nature and land. Local people had had trouble with outsiders in the past, and at first they viewed the newcomers with suspicion. However, by the time Boissière and his colleagues left, the villagers and Conservation International had forged a good understanding. Without this understanding, the now famous expedition might never have happened.

As soon as the new discoveries were announced, there were calls from conservationists for the Foja Mountains to be designated a protected area. However, this shouldn't mean we lose sight of the people who live there. In a letter published in *Nature*, responding to an article about the new discoveries, Douglas Sheil and Manuel Boissière pointed out that the villagers they had recently worked with had been solely responsible for protecting the Foja in the past, and it was they who made the recent expedition possible. 'Local communities must not be viewed as a problem, but as central to the solution,' they wrote.

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Berlepsch's six-wired bird of paradise, *Parotia berlepschi*, was one of several new species discovered by Conservation International scientists in the Foja Mountains, Papua, in November 2005. (Photo by © Conservation International)

