

ASSESSMENT ON BIODIVERSITY, ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND HCV

This report presents the findings of the assessment of 15 estates managed by Lalan Rubbers Pvt. Limited in Kurunegala and Kegalle districts. The estates that are to be assessed include Woodend, Densworth, Mahaoya, Ilukthenna, Reucastle, Sapumalkande, Udabage, Eila, Miyanawita, Dabar and Udapola located in the Deraniyagala area and Muwankanda, Pitiyekanda, Notinghill and Keppetigala in the Kurunegala area.

The biodiversity assessment has been carried out to collect information on the present status of the biodiversity in the 15 estates managed by the Lalan Rubbers Pvt Ltd so that they are able to take effective decisions with respect to maintaining a representative sample of native ecosystems within their managed landscape in order to preserve the biodiversity contained in these ecosystems and thereby ensure that these ecosystem continue to provide ecosystem services to the local community as well as contribute to achieve national and global biodiversity targets.

Therefore, the biodiversity assessment has been designed to generate the necessary data that would make it possible for plantation managers to align their natural resource management strategies with FSC principles, specifically principle 6 (environmental values and impacts), principle 8 (monitoring and assessment), principle 9 (high conservation values) and principle 10 (implementation of management activities).

This assessment was planned to be conducted during the last quarter of 2020. However, due to the restrictions imposed due to recurrent resurgence of COVID-19 outbreaks has prevented the assessment from being undertaken until July 2021. Thus far field assessment has been completed in all 04 estates in the Kurunegala area and 08 estates in the Deraniyagala area. The assessments in the remaining four estates will be completed during August 2021 and the final the draft assessment report will be submitted by the end of September 2021.

The assessment has been completed for 12 (Muwankanda, Pitiyekanda, Notinghill, Dabar, Keppetigala, Ilukthenna, Reucastle, Sapumalkande, Udabage, Eila, Udapola and Woodend) out of the 15 estates. The results thus far indicate that these estates, especially the natural areas within the estates support a rich assemblage of fauna and flora and the plantation management has taken the necessary steps to protect as well as continuously monitor these natural areas to ensure that they remain undisturbed from the planation related activities.

A total of 326 plant species including 43 endemic, 189 indigenous and 94 introduced species were recorded in all the habitats within the 12 estates assessed thus far. Further, 37 plant species recorded during the assessment are listed as Nationally Threatened species. Likewise, a total of 341 animal species including 91 endemic, 247 indigenous and 2 introduced butterfly species were recorded in all the habitats within the 12 estates assessed thus far. Further, 67 animal species recorded during the assessment are listed as Nationally Threatened species. Number of critical species and habitats have been recorded for the first time during the current assessment described in the report.

Results of the present assessment indicates that the total species richness is higher in the current survey for seven out of the eight taxonomic groups surveyed. The number of endemic and threatened species recorded was also high for seven out of the eight taxonomic groups considered during the present survey compared to the previous survey. Slightly fewer number of species and endemic species were recorded for the amphibians during the present survey compared to the previous survey. Therefore, it can be inferred that compared to the previous survey the species richness as well as number of endemic and threatened species remains higher in most instances. It should be noted that some of the species recorded during the previous assessments have not been recorded during the present survey and number of new species including endemic and threatened species have been newly recorded during the present assessment.

However, the observed increase in the species richness and number of endemic species and threatened species has to be interpreted carefully. Generally, the number of species in a landscape increase as the habitats in the landscape improves creating new niches which will be colonized by new species, which is an indication of good land use management. However, this result has to be interpreted carefully since the outcome of an assessment based on which a decision is taken about changes in species composition of a landscape can depend number of other factors such as sampling effort, time of sampling, skill of the observers, changes in the taxonomic and threat status of species, which cannot be completely standardized across assessments. Thus, all these aspects will have to be given due consideration when undertaking an objective comparison across time to identify long term trends in species composition of a landscape. However, based on this data it can be safely concluded that the species richness as well as number of critical species (endemic and threatened species) have not undergone a decline between the two assessments.