

EAGLEWOOD

PROTECTING THE RARE WOOD

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An ancient aromatic timber is bringing much needed income to rural-based landowners in Papua New Guinea (PNG), and inspiring the conservation of some of the richest tropical rainforests on the planet.

Eaglewood - also called agarwood,

gaharu or aloeswood - is known around the world for its highly valuable perfume and incense, and PNG is one of the last remaining frontiers for natural areas of these trees.

Increasing demand for the tree's oil, however, has led to local landowners over-harvesting its timber, hence reducing the chances of natural regeneration and causing commercial

extinction in some areas. Villagers are then paid only a fraction of the real value of the wood.

WWF, the global conservation organisation, is collaborating with local authorities and other non-government organisations to provide education and training to local communities about the importance of eaglewood as a resource, and encouraging sustainable management

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of the industry. These training workshops come under a project funded by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

As part of the pilot project, eaglewood management teams have been set up in selected locations around Papua New Guinea to work with eaglewood farmers in practising and promoting sustainable harvest and trading of eaglewood.

Sites selected include Hunstein Range and Karawari River in East Sepik Province; Vailala in the Gulf Province; Cape Rodney, in the Central Province; and Maramuni in Enga Province.

“Managing eaglewood in a sustainable manner will greatly benefit rural communities by improving the quality of life in villages,” says WWF-PNG’s Sustainable Resource Use trainer, Leo Sunari.

“There is a lot to learn about the species and much information to be exchanged in order to design the best management procedures for commercial harvesting and trade,” he said.

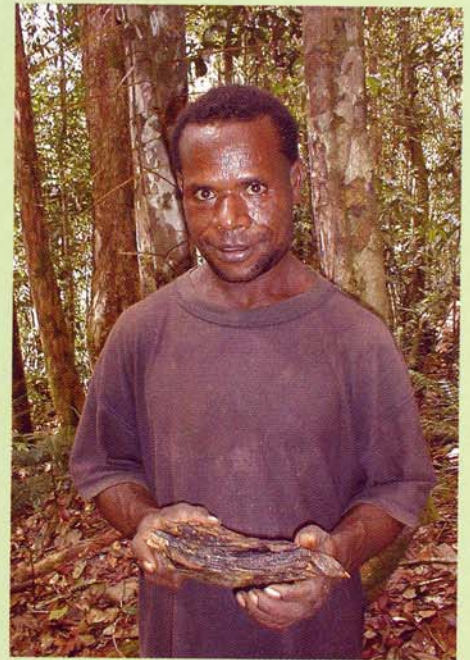
A major goal of the project is to develop a number of demonstration eaglewood management areas. These are areas of forest set aside by landowners for the sustainable harvest of eaglewood.

Within these areas, communities will be assisted to prevent extinction of their eaglewood trees, maximise harvest of resin while minimising damage, promote regeneration, and improve income and benefit sharing.

Teams have so far completed field patrols to Cape Rodney (Central Province) and the Hunstein Range (East Sepik Province), and Vailala in the Gulf Province is next.

So far the team has:

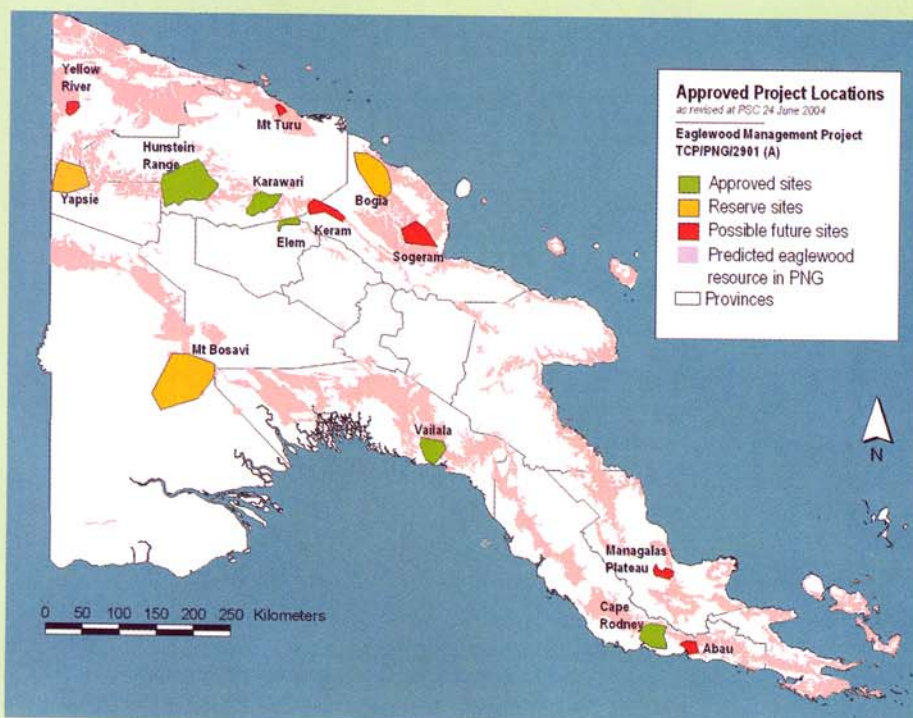
- held community and clan meetings;
- assisted with Clan boundary descriptions;
- drafted marketing and conservation laws and penalties;
- drafted simple eaglewood management plans;
- helped local communities form eaglewood management committees; and
- provided some training on seed / nursery project.



Eaglewood landowner.

The eaglewood management areas will also protect large areas of some of the richest rainforest areas in the world while also providing a living to some of the world’s poorest communities.

By providing training and extension support to local communities and resource owners through its conservation work, WWF hopes those involved in the industry will continue to better manage and harvest this very valuable forest resource, which will in the long-term be a major source of revenue for rural communities, thus sustaining and improving their livelihood.



A clan leader (right) checks out his eaglewood tree.

HARVEST RULES FROM THE SEPIK RIVER

Harvesters might cut down as many as 30 eaglewood trees before finding one tree that contains the precious resin. However, if these trees are left to mature, many of them will develop the resin over time. A few simple rules have been developed by communities from the Hunstein Range in the Sepik River to help improve the chances of finding resin while also leaving more trees to produce in the future—

1. **Look for signs of injury** - Trees which are injured in some way are often more likely to hold the gaharu resin. The resin is produced as a result of damage to the wood. Look for signs such as insect damage, ants nests, lightning strikes, wilting or yellow leaves, dead branches, knot holes or animal burrows.
2. **Don't dig out the roots** - The PNG species of eaglewood (Gyrinops

ledermanii) is unique in that it will grow back from the roots when cut. Resist the temptation to look for the resin in the roots. Leave the tree stump and a new tree will spring back to produce resin in the future.

3. **Cut a branch rather than trunk** - Rather than cutting a whole tree, cut damaged branches. This will allow the tree to continue living and producing into the future.

FACTS ABOUT EAGLEWOOD

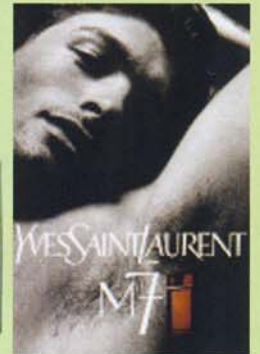
Eaglewood is found in the triangle enclosed by Bengal, Hong Kong and Papua New Guinea, and consists of about 15 species of trees and bushes. Trees of *A. agallocha*, *A. malaccensis* and related species sometimes become infected with a mould, *Phialophora parasitica*, and react by producing an aromatic resin.

The dark resinous heartwood from these forest trees is called eaglewood, agarwood, aloes or oud. It has an elegant, sweet-woody odour of varying character, and is one of the oldest and most famous incense materials of the Far East. The finest quality is called Kanankoh (Kyara in Japanese).

The Chinese marketed and imported eaglewood thousand of years before the Europeans came to know about it. The 'aloe' of the New Testament (John 19:39) might have been eaglewood. In Japan, a ceremony called Kodo enables the participants to experience the scent from small, heated pieces of eaglewood, each with a different character and an accompanying anecdote.



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