

Project Update: March 2011

I have now completed 6 months of my project which commenced on 1st October 2010. In the following paragraphs, I summarise my main activities during these 6 months.

1. Pilot surveys and site selection: The first 2 months of the project were spent deciding upon the extent of the study area and then surveying the landscape to identify appropriate sites (forest fragments and contiguous forest sites) for sampling. Twenty-two sites were finally short-listed for intensive vegetation sampling; these included around nine contiguous forest sites and 11 forest fragments.
2. Vegetation sampling: Vegetation sampling by way of 30m X 30m vegetation plots was commenced in November 2010 and is still ongoing. Eighteen of the 22 sites mentioned above have been sampled, with a minimum of two and maximum of four vegetation plots being sampled in each site. To date, 50 vegetation plots have been completed – 25 each in contiguous and fragmented forests.
3. Data processing and secondary data collection: Activities in this component have so far largely been restricted to the transfer of vegetation data into computer spreadsheets. Secondary data collection such as the collection of wood density data from the literature will be pursued after the completion of fieldwork (May-June 2011 onwards).
4. Data analysis: No progress yet.
5. Results dissemination and outreach: This activity too will largely be pursued towards the end of the project. Preparations are underway at the moment, however, for a convention of local coffee farmers in mid-April 2011 in the study landscape. Coffee farmers are important stakeholders as they are the dominant community and affect nearly all of the study sites. I will have a stall at this convention where I will gauge levels of awareness and interest in ecosystem services, as well as present some material on the value of forests and ecosystem services in a non-technical manner. I have also conducted several formal interactions with local college students, including field visits and training in field techniques.

Upcoming activities

1. Completion of vegetation sampling: I have a target of complete 10-12 more vegetation plots in four sites before wrapping up the field season. This I plan to complete by early May 2011.
2. Secondary data collection: Data on wood density and some other important plant functional traits (e.g. seed mass and dispersal mode) of the different species at the study site will be collated from the literature. Information on other functional traits such as specific leaf area of these species will be directly derived from leaf specimens that I have been collecting during fieldwork. These pieces of information will go towards better understanding subtle shifts in tree communities and ecological dynamics in human-altered forests. This activity will be pursued till August-September 2011.
3. Data analysis: Will commence once most of the data have been collected (July 2011).
4. Results dissemination and outreach: This activity will be further planned based on the response at the coffee farmer convention mentioned above. Presently, I have plans to bring out some publicity material that will go to the coffee-growing community as well as a report submitted to the local forest department. In the slightly longer run, I hope to publish peer-reviewed scientific manuscripts based on this work.