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A Severe Drought in Lambir Hills National Park

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5. A Severe Drought in Lambir Hills National Park

Rhett D. Harrison

Drought can affect the ecology of forests in several ways—via fire, plant mortality, and plant phenology—which then affect the timing and amount of resources available to herbivores, pollinators, and seed dispersers. In this chapter, I consider the incidence of drought and describe its effect on the forest and faunistic elements in turn; I conclude by outlining implications for the maintenance of biodiversity in the region.

5.1 Introduction

The antiquity and stability of a perennially humid equatorial climate was once thought sufficient to explain evolution of the enormous number of plant species found in the forests of Borneo (Whitmore 1984). However, the impact of major climatic and sea-level fluctuations, especially during the Pleistocene glaciations, has also been recognized (Whitmore 1981; Flenley 1998). The similar importance of catastrophic disturbance, such as drought, fire, typhoons, and landslides, has been noted (Whitmore 1984; Ashton 1993), and such rare but severe disturbances clearly have a major influence on forest ecology. Yet our knowledge on the impact of large-scale, severe disturbances remains fragmentary and is generally restricted to studies of plant population dynamics. As the forest is reduced to ever smaller and more isolated patches, through the expansion of human populations and the intensification of agriculture and logging, animal

51

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