

Rio Tinto



FAUNA & FLORA
International
Conserving wildlife since 1903

Fauna & Flora International

Rio Tinto Partnership
Celebrating a decade

“Partnership is about mutuality of trust, responsiveness, and the exchange of skills to allow a positive outcome for conservation. From our perspective, working with Rio Tinto not only helps us to meet our core aim of conserving biodiversity worldwide, but also gives us access to some of the skills needed to operate more effectively as an organisation.”

Mark Rose, chief executive officer, Fauna & Flora International

Cover: Mount Nimba Nature Reserve in Guinea, where Rio Tinto has supported Fauna & Flora International's work – especially building capacity of the Government's environment agency CEGENS, which looks after the Nimba and Simandou areas.

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) is the world's longest established international conservation body. Its goal is to protect the entire spectrum of threatened animal and plant species and ecosystems, worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and taking account of human needs.

Working in more than 40 countries, FFI collaborates with local governments, NGOs, institutions and communities. FFI recognises the impact of corporate activity on biodiversity and aims to influence corporate policy by working with major companies to incorporate biodiversity into their strategic planning.

Celebrating ten years of partnership

Rio Tinto and FFI have worked in partnership since 1999. The partnership's main objective is to ensure that Rio Tinto's operations have a "net positive impact" on biodiversity.

This means minimising the impacts of the company's business and contributing to biodiversity conservation to ensure a region ultimately benefits as a result of Rio Tinto's presence.

Sharing skills and goals means that both sides can achieve results together that neither could achieve alone.

On the mine site, FFI helps Rio Tinto to integrate biodiversity planning and management into site management and facilitate wider strategic support for biodiversity conservation in the countries where both organisations operate. FFI has also played a key role, along with Rio Tinto's other NGO conservation partners, in the development and implementation of Rio Tinto's biodiversity strategy.



New tools for biodiversity management

As part of the biodiversity strategy, Rio Tinto is developing tools for its businesses to achieve results on the ground. FFI has developed new guidance on biodiversity action planning, a planning process that identifies risks and opportunities to biodiversity and determines management actions. By identifying the important biological features on and off a site, an operation is able to understand what impacts mining activities and infrastructure will have on these features and can then put together the most appropriate plan to mitigate impacts as well as to develop additional conservation actions.

Achieving results on the ground

Working constructively with local communities, NGOs and government is important for Rio Tinto. At a local level, Rio Tinto works with FFI's conservation partners in Brazil, Madagascar and Guinea – in targeted investments and involvement in projects of national and local priority for long term conservation and community gain. In West Africa, FFI is developing government regulatory bodies' capacity to work effectively with the mining sector in a project aimed at ensuring sound environmental management of exceptionally rich biodiversity in southern Guinea.



Baby brown mouse lemur, photographed at FFI project in Mahabo Forest, Madagascar.

Offsetting mining impacts on biodiversity

In Madagascar, the partnership has been supporting the conservation of Mahabo Forest. At 1,550 hectares, this is one of the largest fragments of littoral forest (evergreen humid forest on sand) remaining in Madagascar. The conservation of Mahabo Forest provides Rio Tinto Madagascar with a “biodiversity offset” – a conservation action designed to compensate for the unavoidable impacts on biodiversity caused by mining and refining.

Rio Tinto’s biodiversity strategy focuses on land management – first by reducing impacts on biodiversity values through avoidance, minimisation and rehabilitation. Rio Tinto then aims to achieve a positive impact with the use of biodiversity offsets and additional conservation actions. Offsets are only suitable options in the context of developments that are legal and appropriate, with a biodiversity action plan in place, and only after all other possible avenues of action have been pursued.

On the ground, FFI’s partner Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG) is helping to secure the Mahabo Forest. Pressures on the forest include the exploitation of trees for timber and charcoal. These products are essential to local people, providing them with houses and a means of cooking food and providing income. The provision of alternatives is a priority of the conservation plan. MBG is establishing plantations of fast growing alien tree species, and in 2007, more than 105,000 saplings were grown. These alien species are planted on the vast areas of unproductive savannah that surround the forest. Fruit tree saplings are also being grown and distributed to the local community to improve diets and to provide an alternative source of income.

In the badly degraded parts of the forest, MBG is using native tree species for active restoration. These “natives” include species threatened by over exploitation for timber and important lemur food plants.

Flying fox conservation in Madagascar

Madagascar’s three flying fox species of bat are threatened by hunters and habitat loss through burning and conversion of forest to agriculture. Flying foxes disperse seeds and pollen and are an important species of the native forest ecosystem. Working with a local organisation, Madagasikara Voakajy, the Fauna & Flora International – Rio Tinto partnership is supporting the conservation of these species as they will be needed for rehabilitation after mining has been completed.

Raising awareness of the issue with communities, government and professionals is a key part of the partnership's approach as flying foxes are not classed as protected species under Malagasy law. A strong local participation is a prerequisite for their conservation. Also vital to the success of the project is the support of local village associations to become directly involved in the conservation of flying fox roosts. This is part of a wider project to engage communities in the sustainable management and conservation of native forests.

In 2008, more than 218 primary school children and 22 teachers participated in school based events which promoted flying fox and forest conservation. Madagasikara Voakajy is now working with the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research to develop teaching modules for primary schools about flying fox conservation. In addition to the community management and education elements, the project is also using conservation science and field surveys to deliver practical solutions to human bat conflicts (eg bats eaten as bushmeat and bats eating commercial fruit crops) and to identify priority sites for inclusion in a new protected area.

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