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CHANGE THE WORLD

Forests on Tenerife – An emerald island in the Atlantic

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In partnership with José Garcia Casanova

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Report 1

In my Darwin200 project, I investigated forests on Tenerife. They are very important habitats as they are very biodiverse and harbor many endemic species. They also provide important ecosystem services such as the capture and filtration of water. There are two different forest types on the island: Pine Forest and Laurel Forest, both of which I visited and are distinctly different. Pine forests are an open forest with thin undergrowth and characterized by the occurrence of Canary Island pine (Pinus canariensis). Laurel forests are dense forests occurring in areas of frequent rainfall and high humidity.

The distribution of the two types of forests has changed drastically over the last few centuries but in different ways. Laurel forests are strongly fragmented having diminished by 90 % and are strongly fragmented. The two largest Laurel forests are Anaga and Teno and located at opposite sides of the island, which means that species cannot move between the forest sites. While the Laurel Forest has lost from most of its original distribution, Pine Forest has increased in distribution, mainly in the form of pine plantations. These plantations are ecologically not equivalent to the native Pine forests as they contain foreign pine trees, Pinus radiata, and the pine trees are planted closely to each other resulting in dense forests with trees of the same age.

Some of the threats that Laurel and Pine forests face are the same while others are different. One of the biggest threats to Pine forests are forest fires. Pine trees have a very thick bark which makes them resistant to fires to a certain degree but the frequency and intensity of fires has increased so much that the forest areas struggle to recover. For example, this year 15‘000 hectares of forest areas have burnt down. Laurel forests can deal with fires better because they burn less easily due to their high humidity. However, with climate change, fires might become a bigger problem for Laurel forests in the forest.

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