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David Gaveau, PhD

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David Gaveau is a scientist and entrepreneur specializing in tropical deforestation, fire dynamics, and geospatial analysis. He has over 20 years of experience studying forest loss across Equatorial Asia and beyond, with a focus on combining satellite data and field knowledge to understand the drivers and impacts of land-use change.

He is the founder of **The TreeMap**, a company developing **Nusantara Atlas**, an operational platform that provides near real-time and historical monitoring of deforestation, fires, and land-use change across Indonesia, Malaysia and PNG. The platform integrates satellite data, supply chain information, and local context to support decisionmaking by companies, financial institutions, governments, and civil society. It is designed to improve transparency, strengthen accountability, and support compliance with environmental regulations such as NDPE and EUDR.

David also leads the development of **The Media Map**, an innovative **Nusantara Atlas** module that integrates thousands of local news sources to detect and geolocate environmental and social risks (e.g. land conflicts, pollution, human rights issues) connected to commodity production, bridging the gap between satellite observations and on-the-ground realities.

David is a visiting professor and occasionally teaches data science for sustainability at **Sunway University** (Malaysia) and contributes to international expert groups, including the IUCN Oil Crops Specialist Group.

He has published over 60 peer-reviewed scientific articles ([h-index 51; >12776 citations](#)) in leading journals, covering deforestation dynamics, fire ecology, commodity-driven land-use change, and conservation effectiveness. His work has significantly contributed to understanding the role of agricultural expansion, particularly oil palm, in tropical deforestation. His research has been widely cited in international media and policy discussions.

David works at the interface of science, technology, and policy, translating complex geospatial data into actionable insights. His analyses have supported major conservation campaigns and informed corporate and regulatory strategies. He maintains strong collaborations with NGOs, research institutions, and policymakers across Southeast Asia, Europe, and the United States.

Experience

2020-PRESENT

Founder and Managing Director/TheTreeMap, Montpellier France

[TheTreeMap](#) endeavors to protect tropical forests through scientific research and advanced monitoring platforms. David leads cartographers, remote sensing engineers, software developers, and field investigators to empower civil society with the tools to detect deforestation in real-time and ensure what happens on the ground is fair, transparent, and democratic.

We document, study, and predict the human footprint at country and continental scales using sophisticated satellite image processing and data mining algorithms. We track deforestation, fires, and agricultural expansion to control the activities (verify legality) of plantation companies, help buyers of

commodities source more responsibly, understand drivers, evaluate the effectiveness of environmental policies, and develop landscape solutions to tropical deforestation. We bring this information at users' fingertips via impactful web maps and dynamic graphical user interfaces, allowing users to access meaningful reports and animated maps across countries, in administrative units, protected areas, land use planning units, and cadastres.

Current projects over Indonesia and Malaysia: we develop the [Nusantara Atlas](#) to protect Indonesian forests. This free online platform is used by over 2500 registered users, 50 Indonesian conservation NGOs and provides regular stories and monthly reports of deforestation alerts to Indonesian civil society and journalists who conduct analyses of the companies involved, submit findings to the relevant authorities, and inform the public. We help several cosmetics companies clean up their palm oil supply chain. We develop predictive deforestation models to assess the additionality of proposed conservation projects and build time series of burned areas worldwide. We collaborate with the Conservation Media program of the Ornithology Lab at Cornell University to disseminate scientific findings via impactful, high-quality [animations](#). We map palm oil and coconut expansion worldwide, and rubber plantations (including Jungle rubber) in West Kalimantan.

2012-2020

Senior Scientist (2012-2017), then Senior Associate (2017-2020)/Center for International Forestry Research, Indonesia

David delivered scientific publications on the causes and consequences of tropical deforestation, forest degradation and fires, and the effectiveness of protected areas and policy interventions. He led studies on the drivers of oil palm and pulpwood expansion, their impacts on forests in Indonesia and Malaysia, and the political economy of fires in Indonesia. He participated in a study that modelled the relationship between deforestation and outbreaks of Ebola virus in Central Africa. His work combined satellite and drone imagery with field investigations, climate, and cadastral data. He led a team of international scientists to measure emissions from burning peatlands during the catastrophic 2015 fire season ([video](#)). He was one of two scientists who initiated CIFOR's [Fire and Haze](#) research portfolio and was on the Fire Advisory Panel that advised the Indonesian government in mid-2015 to focus on peatland restoration. He helped raise >USD 900K from DFID to research the causes and impacts of forest and land fires in Indonesia, develop forest monitoring systems, and support sustainable land use developments in Papua and Borneo. The monitoring systems evolved to become [Nusantara Atlas](#). David also carried out an independent assessment of the performance and accountability of a USD 44 million project funded by the Norwegian government to support the Indonesian government's restore degraded peatlands, the source of recurring land fires.

2011-2012

Consultant/Wildlife Conservation Society-Cambodia Program

David developed the historical and future deforestation baselines of evergreen and deciduous forests for the project description document of the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary REDD project, WCS's first voluntary carbon market in Eastern Cambodia. The document passed the VCS/CCBA validation audit in 2014.

2009-2014

Scientific Director/ SIPEF Biodiversity Indonesia

David served as Scientific Director of [SIPEF biodiversity Indonesia](#) until 2014. He helped establish the SIPEF conservation concession in Sumatra, one of 16 Ecosystem Restoration Concessions (ERC) in Indonesia licensed by the Environment and Forestry Minister. His work included Identifying a priority area for establishing the concessions, setting up deforestation baselines, planning law enforcement patrols, and identifying solutions to agricultural encroachments.

2009-2012

Landscape Ecologist/NGO Living Landscapes Indonesia and Stanford University

David managed a research station in the *Gunung Tarak* Hydrological reserve buffering *Gunung Palung* National Park in Kalimantan. He coordinated field team surveys (10 staff) in carbon accounting, fauna and flora, and other ecological measurements of seed-predator interactions.

2002-2007

Landscape Ecologist/Wildlife Conservation Society-Indonesia Program

David began his career in conservation with WCS-IP. He raised USD 80K from the European Union and the CEPF to undertake scientific research on the effectiveness of Sumatran protected areas in reducing deforestation. Around the same time, David started a PhD at the [Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology](#). Together with WCS colleagues, he assisted the Office of the *Bukit Barisan Selatan* National Park in Sumatra with monitoring threats, establishing vegetation surveys, and developing a new zoning system within park boundaries. He led socio-economic surveys over >1000 coffee farmers who encroached park boundaries to understand their profiles, needs, and expectations and identify solutions to coffee-related encroachments. He prepared a comprehensive report for UNESCO on the history and underlying causes of deforestation within the National Park. Following the work of WCS-IP, UNESCO included BBSNP in the [Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra](#). David developed different statistical methods to measure the performance of protected areas and published his work in four scientific papers authored by WCS-IP, and this constituted a PhD thesis.

1999-2002

Higher Scientific Officer/Center for Ecology and Hydrology, UK

David participated in a large EU-funded mapping project over central Siberian to map the carbon stock of boreal using satellite-based SAR Interferometry. He investigated airborne laser scanning to retrieve canopy height with sub-meter precision.

Skills

- Public Speaking • Data Analytics • Scientific Writing • Deforestation & fire monitoring • Supply chains monitoring • Development of geo-platforms • Remote Sensing • GIS • Effectiveness of conservation interventions (incl. PAs) • Biodiversity Assessments • Political Economy of Fires • GhG emissions • Fund Raising.

Education

2004-2009

Ph.D. in Biodiversity management/Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent, UK. Developed a range of statistical tools to measure the effectiveness of Protected areas in Sumatra: Thesis title: *Evaluating the effectiveness of protected areas in reducing tropical deforestation in Sumatra*.

1994-1995

MSc in Applied Optics/Imperial College London, UK.

1994-1995

BSc in Applied Physics/Kingston University, UK.

Selected Publications

- Descals A, Salim MA, Husnayaen, Gunawan R, Salsabila F, Sheil D, Meijaard E, **Gaveau D**. Global oil palm deforestation declines after zero-deforestation commitments. *Nature Sustainability* (in prep)
- Heilmayr R, Benedict J, Orland B, Afif H, Barr C, Descals A, Husnayaen, Kridalaksana, A, Manurung T, Nagara, G, **Gaveau D**. Indonesia's pulp sector at risks reversing progress towards zero deforestation. *Science* (under review)
- **Gaveau D**, Descals A, Salim MA (2026) Nationwide monthly burned area monitoring in Indonesia using Sentinel-2, *Plos One* <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0331831>
- Meijaard E, Wafiy M, Ni'Mattulah S, Dennis R, Hadisiswoyo P, Sheil D, et al. Extreme Rainfall Event in Sumatra Caused Critical Habitat Loss and Lethal Impacts to the Critically Endangered Tapanuli Orangutan. 2026 (in press *Current Biology*)
- Sheil, D., Descals, A., Meijaard, E., and **Gaveau, D.**: Rubber planting and deforestation, *Nature*, 644, E20-E22, 2025
- Henley D, **Gaveau D**, Meijaard E. The end of nature in Borneo: a concise contemporary history. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (in press)
- Ekaputri, Andini Desita, **David LA Gaveau**, Robert Heilmayr, and Kimberly M. Carlson. "Uneven participation of independent and contract smallholders in certified palm oil mill markets in Indonesia." *Communications Earth & Environment* 6, no. 1 (2025): 721.
- Le Maire G, **Gaveau D**, Descals A, Pramulya M, Sampurno J, Thaler P, et al. Mapping rubber monoculture and jungle rubber across Kalimantan using multisource satellite data. *International Journal of Remote Sensing*. 2025;46(19):7019-43
- Descals, Adrià, **David LA Gaveau**, Serge Wich, Zoltan Szantoi, and Erik Meijaard. "Global mapping of oil palm planting year from 1990 to 2021." *Earth System Science Data* 16, no. 11 (2024): 5111-5129.
- Eggen M, Heilmayr R, Anderson P, Armson R, Austin K, Azmi R, Bayliss P, Burns D, Erbaugh JT, Ekaputri AD, **Gaveau DL**. Smallholder participation in zero-deforestation supply chain initiatives in the Indonesian palm oil sector: Challenges, opportunities, and limitations. *Elem Sci Anth*. 2024 May 16;12(1):00099.
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- Descals, A., **Gaveau, D.L.A**, Verger, A., Sheil, D., Naito, D., and Peñuelas, J. (2022). Unprecedented fire activity above the Arctic Circle linked to rising temperatures. *Science* 378, 532-537. <https://www.science.org/doi/abs/10.1126/science.abn9768>

- Descals, A., Wich, S., Szantoi, Z., Struebig, M.J., Dennis, R., Hatton, Z., Ariffin, T., Unus, N., **Gaveau, D.L.A.**, and Meijaard, E. (2023). High-resolution global map of closed-canopy coconut. *Earth System Science Data Discussions*, 1-30.
- Spencer, K.L., Deere, N.J., Aini, M., Avriandy, R., Campbell-Smith, G., Cheyne, S.M., **Gaveau, D.L.A.**, Humle, T., Hutabarat, J., and Loken, B. (2023). Implications of large-scale infrastructure development for biodiversity in Indonesian Borneo. *Science of the Total Environment* 866, 161075.
- Sloan, S., Locatelli, B., Cattau, M., **Gaveau, D.L.A.**, Tacconi, L., Andela, N. (2022). Extreme Burning Declined Across Indonesian Managed Lands but Extended into Core Peatlands, 2002-2019. *Communications Earth&Environment* 3 (1), 1-12. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-02200522-6>
- **Gaveau D.L.A.**, Locatelli B, Salim MA, Manurung T, Descals A, Angelsen A, et al. Slowing deforestation in Indonesia follows declining oil palm expansion and lower oil prices. *Plos One*. 2022.17(3): e0266178. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0266178>
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- **Gaveau, D.L.A.**, Santos, L., Locatelli, B., Salim, M.A., Husnayaen, H., Meijaard, E., Heatubun, C., Sheil, D., 2021. Forest loss in Indonesian New Guinea (2001–2019): Trends, drivers and outlook. *Biological Conservation* 261, 109225. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2021.109225>
- Murdiyarso, D., Sasmito, S.D., Sillanpää, M., MacKenzie, R., **Gaveau, D.L.A.**, 2021. Mangrove selective logging sustains biomass carbon recovery, soil carbon, and sediment. *Scientific Reports* 11, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-91502-x>
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- **Gaveau D.L.A.**, Locatelli B., Salim M.A., Yaen H., Pacheco P., Sheil D. (2019) Rise and fall of forest loss and industrial plantations in Borneo (2000–2017). *Conservation Letters*, e12622. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12622>

- J. Miettinen, **D. L.A Gaveau**, S. C. Liew. (2019) Comparison of visual and automated oil palm mapping in Borneo. *International Journal of Remote Sensing* 40, 8174-8185.
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