

# Charles Lankester

## When "Rowdy Rebels" Move to Save the Forests

■ In September 1985, a bugle "call to action" was sounded by a task force that had been assembled by the World Resources Institute, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The task force produced horrific statistics about deforestation in tropical countries. Among those statistics: that 11 million ha (27 million acres) of tropical forest, or an area about the size of Austria or Portugal, are being cut down and not replaced every year; and that irrigation systems supporting over 400 million people on the lowland plains of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh are increasingly threatened by the often destructive land-use practices of 46 million hill dwellers.

But the task force also documented 39 success stories in a variety of activities everywhere from Zambia and Panama to Nepal, to show that there are feasible solutions. And it set out a plan for accelerated action that involved doubling the worldwide expenditure in this sector to \$8 billion over the subsequent five years—as a first step. Staggering as that figure may sound, it is little more than a deposit on the cost of what must be spent if reasonable ecological equilibrium is to be restored.

The plan received political endorsement at an international meeting convened and chaired by President François Mitterrand of France, and in July 1987, a conference of world leaders and forestry experts was held at Bellagio, Italy, to give the program even greater momentum. Among the people behind this ambitious—but realistic—plan are two foresters who enjoy the description of "rowdy rebels" for having stirred their organizations into action on the broadest front. They are John Spears, an Englishman who is the senior forestry adviser in the World Bank, and Charles "Chuck" Lankester, who is the principal technical adviser with the UNDP.

Chuck Lankester was born in England—his great-grandfather was director of the British Museum. As an infant, he was the sole survivor in his house following an air raid on the city of Leicester. At the age of 17, Lankester flew alone to Vancouver to start a new life; he had \$100 sewn into the lining of his tweed coat. That was in 1957. He did odd jobs before finding work as a forest surveyor, which helped pay his way through university. Then he worked with a forestry firm in B.C. until 1961, when he was recruited (by telegram) to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome. In 1963, he became the FAO consultant to the newly established World Food Programme (WFP), which was building up its forestry sector. He moved to the UNDP in 1969.

Here, speaking in advance of the July 1987 conference of world leaders and forestry experts at Bellagio, Italy, Lankester describes part of his work with the World Food Programme, focusing on a successful program in Turkey, before commenting on the current campaign for tropical forests:

"I was the most junior person by far—23 or 24 [years old]—in our division at FAO, when at a staff meeting one day my director said [that] someone would have to keep an eye on this new organization down the street. He pointed to a rotund Sudanese forester, who claimed he was too desperately busy; so the job was given to me. When I started liaising with the World Food