

# AI maps trees from space to protect remote forests

BY LUCINDA CAMERON

**A** Scottish company is at the “forefront of the race” to save remote forests and endangered apes by mapping trees from space.

Space Intelligence, based in Edinburgh, uses different types of satellite images combined with artificial intelligence and ecological expertise to create detailed maps with insights about tropical forests.

The data is used to monitor change, helping conservationists prevent deforestation and reduce carbon emitted into the atmosphere.

The work also helps to protect the habitats of species like orangutans which are currently classed as critically endangered.

Space Intelligence chief executive Dr Murray Collins said seeing orangutans while working in Northern Sumatra’s Gunung Leuser National Park earlier this year highlighted the importance of developing technology to help tackle climate change.

He said: “It really was a defining moment for me. I had only ever seen orangutans in a conservation setting, so to witness them as they should be in their natural habitat was a real privilege.

“It underlined to me what’s at stake and why it’s

so important to develop sophisticated technology in the fight against climate change.

“For me, coming back to Indonesia and feeling the familiar heat and humidity, hearing the insects and birds and catching sight of a critically endangered species just makes me even more determined.

“We have to use space technology to give us the edge on addressing the dual climate and biodiversity crises.”

When businesses have decarbonised their operations as far as possible and need to offset what remains, they can buy carbon credits.

Space Intelligence said its data supports forest carbon project developers in generating these carbon credits and also enables those who buy them to have independent insight into key metrics such as deforestation rates and carbon storage within projects.

The firm has previously been supported by Edinburgh University’s Bayes Centre – an innovation hub for data science and artificial intelligence – and now works with companies globally to support their investment into nature.

The Bayes Centre has received £30.3 million

from the UK Government and £2.2m from the Scottish Government as part of the City Deal-funded Data Driven Innovation Initiative.

Scotland Office minister Malcolm Offord said: “It’s great to see a pioneering Scottish company at the forefront of the race to save remote forests and endangered apes by combining big data from space and world-class science.

“The inspiring work of Dr Collins and his Space Intelligence team is a vital tool for preventing deforestation and protecting orangutans and other wildlife.”





**Orangutans in the treetops.**

