



# AMAZON GRACE

**CULTURES** IN THE HEART OF THE BRAZILIAN RAINFOREST A REMOTE INDIAN TRIBE, THE ZO'E, LIVES A STONE AGE EXISTENCE. THEY HAVE NO NEED FOR CLOTHES, NO CONCEPT OF OWNERSHIP, AND DISPUTES ARE SETTLED BY BOUTS OF TICKLING. YET THE FRENCH ECOLOGIST WHO HAS FILMED THEM SAYS THEY HAVE MUCH TO TEACH US





In today's global village of 24-hour connectivity, urban sprawl and tourist trails to every last Micronesian island, the notion of remote tribes, untouched by civilisation, captivates as much as ever, writes *Alastair Smart*. Especially as their fabled way of living – sustainable, self-sufficient and 'eco-friendly' – is one we're all now meant to aspire to.

Nicolas Hulot, the French ecologist and driving force behind President Sarkozy's much-vaunted 'green revolution', has become a champion of one such tribe. The people in these astonishing photographs are the Zo'e (or 'People of the Moon'), who live by the side of the Erepecuru River in a remote region of the Amazon rainforest in northern Brazil. Just 240 in number, these hunter-gatherers date back to the Stone Age and remained unknown to the wider world until 1989. Hulot first encountered the Zo'e while making his television show *Ushuaia*, and was struck by what this, as he called it, 'superior civilisation', could teach the rest of us.

The Brazilian government's Department for Isolated Indians has discovered 22 such tribes over the past two decades and has adopted a policy of 'non-assimilation', creating a no-go area around a new-found people's territory, to protect them from the ravages of loggers, miners and cattle-ranchers, as well as from diseases imported by outsiders.

Perhaps the Zo'e habitat should have been marked a no-go area for Hulot, too – isn't the camera, in its way, every bit as invasive as the chainsaw? Hulot insists, though, that the Zo'e 'offer us the ultimate message' about how to save the planet – through 'the two golden principles' of moderation and sharing. ☺

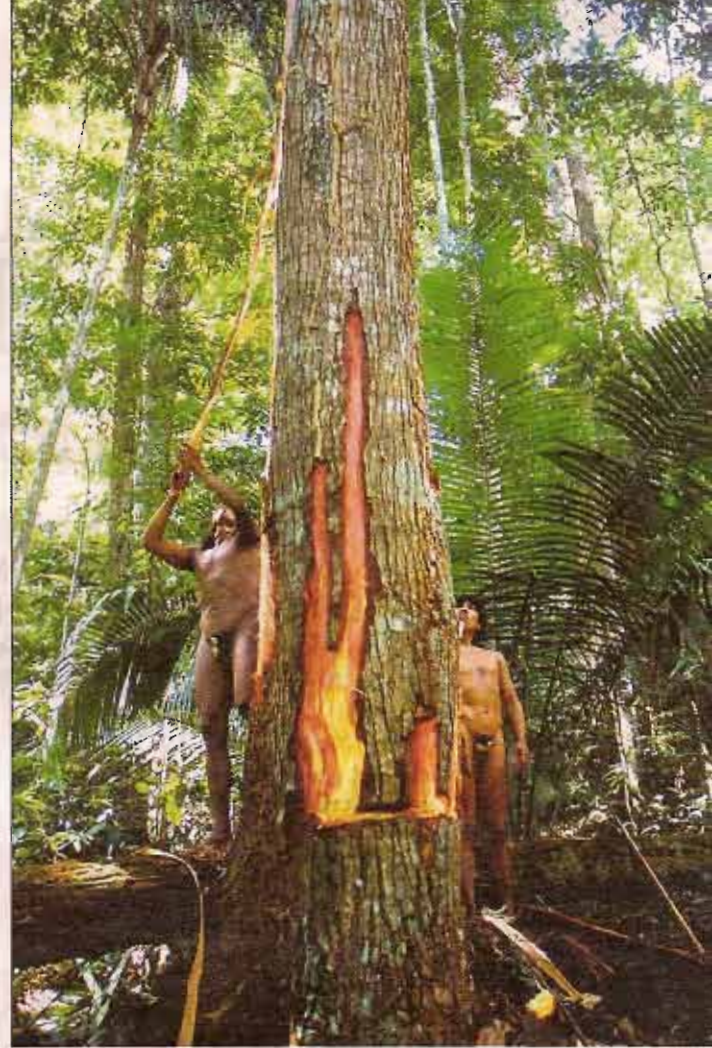
**Previous page** After one of their young is mauled to death by a jaguar, the Zo'e head into the forest to start a fire they hope will pacify its evil spirits

**Above** As they have done for millennia, the Zo'e live in straw huts. Parents do not necessarily share a hut with their children, for the only concept of family is that of the greater clan. The tribe has no notion of monogamy, nor any phrase for 'thank you', as everything is shared. Any quarrel is resolved by the disputants being pinned down and tickled until they start laughing



**Above top** By age 10, Zo'e boys are masters of the bow and arrow; toucans and the pig-like peccary are their usual prey. The Zo'e hunt only as much as they need to eat – Hulot says they know intuitively how much food they can take without disturbing the balance of the environment

**Above and right** The Zo'e wash at all hours. The aim is not so much to clean their bodies, as to wash away evil



**Above top** Two men strip the bark from a soap-tree to use for bathing. Zo'e men go about naked, apart from a palm-leaf strap around the penis

**Above** The women's only clothing is a hat of white vulture feathers. All adults also have a wooden plug – called the 'poturu' – affixed to their chin. This is the symbol of Zo'e ethnicity