

Brazil's Amazon rainforest suffers worst fires in a decade

- **Satellites record 61% rise in hotspots over September 2019**
- **Scientist warns: 'It could get worse if the drought continues'**



Smoke and flames rise from an illegally lit fire in an Amazon rainforest reserve, south of Novo Progresso in Para State, Brazil, in August. Photograph: Carl de Souza/AFP/Getty Images

Reuters in Brasilia

Thu 1 Oct 2020 16.48 BST

Fires in **Brazil**'s Amazon increased 13% in the first nine months of the year compared with a year ago, as the rainforest region experiences its worst rash of blazes in a decade, data from space research agency Inpe has shown.

Satellites in September recorded 32,017 hotspots in the world's largest rainforest, a 61% rise from the same month in 2019.

In August last year, surging fires in the Amazon captured global headlines and prompted criticism from world leaders such as France's Emmanuel Macron that **Brazil** was not doing enough to protect the rainforest.

On Tuesday, the US Democratic presidential candidate, Joe Biden, called for a world effort to offer \$20bn to end Amazon deforestation and threatened Brazil with unspecified “economic consequences” if it did not “stop tearing down the forest”.

President Jair Bolsonaro lambasted Biden’s comment as a “cowardly threat” to Brazil’s sovereignty and a “clear sign of contempt”.

Data from Inpe released on Thursday showed that in 2019, fires spiked in August and declined considerably the month after, but this year’s peak has been more sustained. Both August and September of 2020 have matched or surpassed last year’s single-month high.

“We have had two months with a lot of fire. It’s already worse than last year,” said Ane Alencar, science director for Brazil’s Amazon Environmental Research Institute (Ipam).

“It could get worse if the drought continues. We are at the mercy of the rain.”

The Amazon is experiencing a more severe dry season than last year, which scientists attribute in part to warming in the tropical North Atlantic Ocean pulling moisture away from South America.

The entire Amazon, which spans nine countries, currently has 28,892 active fires, according to a fire monitoring tool funded in part by the US space agency, Nasa.

The fires in September are not only burning recently deforested areas and farmland, where ranchers set them to clear land, but are also increasingly burning virgin forest, a worrying trend that suggests the rainforest is becoming drier and more prone to fire.

Roughly 62% of major Amazon fires were in forests in September, compared with only 15% in August, according to an analysis of satellite images by the US-based non-profit Amazon Conservation.

The warming of the North Atlantic is also helping drive drought in the Brazilian Pantanal, the world's largest wetland, which has suffered more fires this year than ever previously recorded, according to Inpe data.

A Federal University of Rio de Janeiro analysis found that 23% of the wetlands, which are home to the densest population of jaguars in the world, has burned.

"Brazil is on fire," said Cristiane Mazzetti, a forest campaigner for advocacy group Greenpeace Brasil, in a statement.