

Fundación Jocotoco Ecuador – Summary Report for 2008

FJ celebrated its 10th anniversary of operations during this year. Beginning with its first habitat reserve at Tapichalaca in southern Ecuador (to protect the discovery site of the newly discovered species the Jocotoco Antpitta) in September 1998, it now manages or is part owner of nine habitat reserves. These are located on both east and west slopes along the Andes from Rio Canandé in the north to Jorupe near the border with Peru. The area now under protection is ca10,000 hectares on which over 800 species of birds are found, with over 50 species globally threatened to some degree. About one thousand hectares were added to the reserves during the year, 500ha at Canandé, with the remainder spread between Buenaventura, Jorupe, Tapichalaca and Yanacocha. This report presents highlights of some of the activities during the year.

Pale-headed Brush Finch –Yunguilla reserve This critically endangered species was rediscovered by FJ member Dr Niels Krabbe, and coresearchers in 1999. They found 10 pairs in an Andean valley south of Cuenca – the first of their species to be seen for over thirty years. Bird Life International now classifies this species as one of 16 which have been saved from extinction by human intervention in recent times. In 2008, the number of pairs at Yunguilla (still the only known population in the world) exceeded 100 for the first time. The reduction of the nest parasitism by Shiny Cowbirds from near 100% to near zero now is the main cause of this tremendous increase in the population of the Brush Finches.



Tapichalaca Reserve and the Jocotoco Antpitta The regular daily feeding of worms to one pair of Jocotocos by reserve warden Franco Mendoza continued through the year, so that visitors could enjoy close views of this reclusive species without the use of tape recordings. The technique was adopted after training from Angel Paz at Mindo. This abundance of food has resulted in rapid breeding with three young birds appearing in sequence at 3 or 4 month intervals. In November it was apparent that a fourth nestling was being fed, and an intensive search led to the discovery of the nest – the first one found after ten years. The feeding site is also regularly used by Chestnut-naped Antpittas, and by the very rare Andean Coati.



All four of the young Jocotoco Antpittas. Nos 1 and 2 on the left almost in adult plumage, No3, centre, at a few months old, and the just discovered nestling on the right, just before it left the nest.

A new species of frog – a very tiny (10mm) *Pristimantis* (formerly *Eleutherodactylus*) has just been described. *P. andinognomus* was first collected at Tapichalaca in 2001, when *Hyla tapichalaca* was discovered. But it is only recently that close inspection showed these were not baby frogs as at first thought but fully grown adults. This new species is the second smallest frog known in Ecuador's extensive herpetofauna of about 450 species.

Following the significant success at Buenaventura with nest boxes for the El Oro Parakeet (see below), boxes have been installed in the lower region of the reserve (below 2000m altitude) for the benefit of White-breasted Parakeets, a threatened species which is present in this area. These boxes are now in use for roosting by a small flock, and it is hoped that nesting may occur soon.

Botanical studies in the area have continued, and a visit to mountains 40km to the south in October established range extensions to some Tapichalaca endemics.

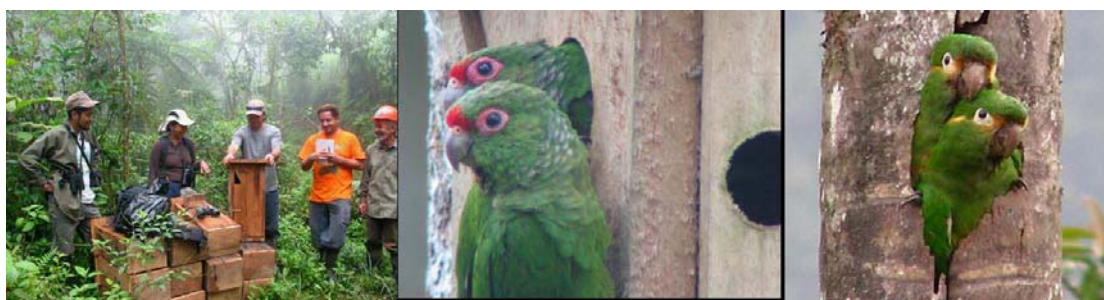


Three Tapichalaca endemic plants which were found in Cordillera Lagunillas in October – a new species of *Sobralia* orchid, *Bomarea longipes*, and a *Symbolanthus* gentian. A very rare tree-viper, *Bothrops pulchra* was found in a very confused state on a road in Tapichalaca and was returned to a tree.

A trail has now been made up to the summit of Tapichalaca. There are small caves along the cliffs which surround the summit, with abundant evidence of bromeliad consumption by Spectacled Bears. The vegetation near the summit comprises beautiful paramo with flowering shrubs. Trail cameras in the reserve have 'captured' Woolly Mountain Tapir (globally endangered), Puma, and the rare Andean Paca.

The enlarged dining and communal areas in the lodge are now in full operation, with ladies from the local village of Valladolid in charge of the domestic operations. Tapichalaca reserve was the subject of a chapter in the book 'Rainforest Safari' by James Parry, which described about 24 important rainforests around the world. World Land Trust also featured in the book.

Buenaventura The lek of Long-wattled Umbrellabirds, close to the Umbrellabird Lodge, continues to provide good views of two or three displaying males of this threatened species. The nest-box programme for the threatened El Oro Parakeet has been very successful, and now accounts for the majority of the fledged young birds. This work is supported financially by the Loro Parque Foundation.



Nestbox construction at Buenaventura, and a pair of El Oro Parakeets using a box. (right) a pair of globally threatened Golden-plumed Parakeets at their nest in a Wax Palm at Tapichalaca.

Rio Canandé Several important pieces of land which consolidate the central area of the reserve have been acquired. The reserve area is now about 2000 ha. The lowland Choco forest of northwest

Ecuador is vanishing at the highest rate currently due to exploitation for timber followed by oil-palm plantation development. A new dining and communal building was completed next to the existing visitor's lodge this year. Again the domestic staff are recruited from the local villages. A schoolteacher is also funded by FJ for the village school.

There have been pleasing developments for two of the ten threatened bird species in the reserve. A very rare Banded-ground Cuckoo is now regularly present close to the lodge, and recently a flock of up to eleven Great-green Macaws has arrived (the largest known flock in Ecuador). Nest boxes for this species were installed two years ago, and for a time were investigated by two pairs of Macaws, which then seemed to disappear.

Trail cameras have confirmed the presence of all four of the large cats – Jaguar, Puma, Ocelot and Margay. Maria Fernanda Cheka from the Católica University Quito has produced an identification guide-book to the butterflies of the reserve, in which 125 species are described.



Jorupe This reserve in the dry deciduous forest of south-west Ecuador was increased to about 1600 ha by new land purchases. Construction of a visitors lodge started here in October, and is due to be completed by March 2009. This will complete a long planned 'circuit' for visitors of the three reserves Buenaventura, Tapichalaca and Jorupe to experience a huge variety of habitats. The Utuana reserve can also be accessed in an hour from Jorupe.

Narupa This reserve of 400 ha protects an area of foothill tropical forest at about 1100-1400m altitude just above the Amazon basin, east of Quito. Work has continued to establish trails for visitors in the future. Military Macaws and Orange-breasted Falcons have been recorded in or close to the reserve.

Ayampe The valley of the Rio Ayampe, close to the Pacific ocean is being investigated as the possible site for a habitat reserve to protect the globally threatened endemic hummingbird, the Esmeraldas Woodstar. A research team worked there early in 2008, and discovered several nest sites of the Woodstar – the first ever to be found. The team also clarified plumage details between females of this species and the similar Little Woodstar.



Esmeraldas Woodstars at a nest in the valley of the Rio Ayampe (centre). A Slaty Becard (right) one of about five other globally threatened birds found in this valley.

Habitat restoration by reforestation With funding from the Carbon Project of the World Land Trust, FJ currently employs about 25 local people to carry out tree seedling cultivation and planting on about 500 hectares of pastures at Yanacocha, Buenaventura, Tapichalaca, and Jorupe reserves. About 200,000 trees per year are being planted using local native species. Some of the seedling production is also contracted out to local villages. This will continue for several years. Lecture and poster presentations concerning this project were made by WLT and FJ at a day long symposium held at the Linnean Society of London in November.



Reptile and Amphibian surveys The herpetology team at the National Museum in Quito (MECN) have been carrying out inventory studies of reptiles and amphibians at each of the FJ reserves. The first rapid assessment phase has now been completed at each of the eight main reserves, and reports issued. During 2008, the team has now completed the first phase studies at the four reserves of Ecominga in the valley of the Rio Pastaza north east of Baños. Several new species have been identified, and a larger number remain to be identified fully pending the results of DNA studies. It is hoped eventually to combine all the results from Jocotoco and Ecominga in a fully illustrated comprehensive report or book which would cover about 250 species. This study was funded by FJ.

Mammal surveys The trail cameras installed by Ivan Samuels continue to yield excellent results. Here are some recent photos of mammals in the reserves.



(l to r) Trail camera photo of an Ocelot at Canande reserve; a bat visits a hummingbird feeder at Buenaventura; a rare Andean Coati at the Antpitta feeding site on Tapichalaca; a small cat seen at Jorupe reserve-possibly a Pampas Cat.

Acknowledgements

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