

## A new research centre for the Namoncahue Biological Corridor

by Karl Yunis Kretschmer, Director of Parques Para Chile

During the past year, Parques para Chile has focused on building a research centre within the Namoncahue Biological Corridor. This centre is called Aldea Namoncahue. The concept behind this project is to create a place where post-graduate university students can study and put into practice methods for management, research and use of protected areas in Chile. Aldea Namoncahue will focus research in the areas of sustainable forestry and silviculture, biodiversity monitoring, native species horticulture, rural development, protected area management and green architecture. By establishing the research centre, Parques para Chile, alongside Chilean and international universities are establishing a new way of protecting public-private biological corridors. By building a permanent presence in a remote pre-cordillera forest, we hope to create an example of how conservation and local development can go hand in-hand. As campesinos and local students take part in the Aldea's conservation agenda, they will learn new ways of working with their own forest parcels through sustainable management.

Thanks to a generous donation from Rainforest Concern and the Planet Foundation, Switzerland, we have been able to completely restore the site where the Aldea is being constructed. This site was once an enormous sawmill and collection area used to harvest thousands of old-growth temperate rainforest trees. With local campesinos and landowners, the restoration process has not only mitigated severe erosion, it has also generated a keen interest in the community. Several local farmers have recently expressed support for this type of ecological restoration and surely this will have an impact on how they will mitigate soil erosion in their own land parcels.

We have completed the construction of horse stables, a large workshop and storage area, and a mountain refuge, which will be used by local university and school students. We are also building a much needed residence for two CONAF National Park rangers. This is an important step forward for the Namoncahue Biological Corridor, since it represents public-private cooperation for protection of both National Reserve lands and private protected lands owned by Parques para Chile, Rainforest Concern and local partners. By placing CONAF employees within Aldea Namoncahue, rangers will benefit from being able to use our research centre as a place to train local landowners and



Karl Yunis and Fiona Pérez during her visit to Chile

participate in training and educational activities that the centre will host in the coming years.

A master plan for design of Aldea Namoncahue is being completed and a research tower has been designed and is ready for construction. This research tower will house 6 scientists and contains a meteorological station, observation deck, and a biomass heating system that will use wood chips and sawdust from the enormous amount of discarded wood mass left behind from the sawmill. From near the research tower, insulated pipes will send hot water for personal use and heating throughout the research centre. A high-efficiency water turbine system has also been designed and will be installed in the coming months in order to produce enough energy to power laptops, LED lighting systems and power the meteorological station among other uses. By developing and maintaining a comprehensive system for heat and electricity, we hope to put into practice a self-sustaining model for development of protected areas in Chile.

Two important institutions have joined our project recently, these are; The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and The Man and the Biosphere programme -UNESCO. These alliances will work toward the following goals: research and monitoring of red-list species and innovations in protected area use and management. Both of these projects will involve working with local

landowners and government institutions in order to promote protection of biodiversity and support sustainable use of natural resources.

We are, as always, grateful for the generous support that Rainforest Concern and Planet Foundation have given to the Namoncahue Biological Corridor. Through building Aldea Namoncahue, we are creating a place where biodiversity conservation and research is becoming a real-life model for the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve management. Namoncahue is becoming the centrepiece of how public-private conservation efforts can effectively protect biodiversity whilst at the same time create employment and training opportunities for the local community.

All the best from Parques para Chile to our partners at Rainforest Concern and their loyal supporters.



Namoncahue tarantula