

ECOAN's activities in Peru

by Martin Stanley, Holly Hill trust

2009 was a very busy year for ECOAN, which has expanded its operations beyond the original Polylepis reforestation program in the Vilcanota Mountains. Rainforest Concern continued to support the community reforestation program of Polylepis, and ECOAN has set up more tree nurseries to grow a local variety of alder, which has been planted around the villages and along streams etc., with the idea that in time it will provide firewood and timber (and so help protect the slower growing Polylepis woodlands typically further away from the villages, as villagers will have a source of wood closer by). However, as an endemic species it is preferable to plant alder to more eucalyptus. ECOAN continues to help the communities in practical ways by installing chimneys in some homes to reduce smoke pollution inside their houses, by extending the vegetable production project, and helping build a community hall, which is also used for a local handicrafts market.

With funding from the Moore Foundation ECOAN has set up a nature reserve with a research station at Abra Patricia in the cloud forest region in North Peru. The reserve has many endemic and rare birds and woolly monkeys.

ECOAN organised expeditions over the Andes near Marcapata in the cloud forest region on the Eastern side of the Andes going towards the Amazon, where the Trans-Oceanic Highway is being built connecting Brazil with Peru. The road is known as the Trans-Amazonica in Brazil. This is a huge World Bank funded project and while it



Photo: ECOAN

Reforestation with Polylepis seedlings. Community of Rumira Sondormayo

may bring some positive development for some communities and massive profits for both governments and a few companies, it will also cause widespread exploitation of the forests, loss of biodiversity and very probably, the disruption of indigenous communities.

ECOAN has identified some sites of cloud forest near this road under construction, where there are forested areas with endemic birds, and is helping a few interested land owners to register their land as private nature reserves to get better protected status. Often more damage is done after the roads are newly completed with strip development of houses with more destruction of

forests and wildlife. Rainforest Concern has also been helping ECOAN with this initial work.

In early 2010 there were devastating flash floods in the Cusco region of Peru, where tens of thousands of peoples homes were destroyed and many people drowned. These flash floods were probably made worse by the extensive deforestation, which has occurred over the years on hillsides above many towns and villages.

One of the areas badly affected is a wetland area south of Cusco called Huacarpay. ECOAN got this site registered as a RAMSAR wetland site because of its importance for birds, and has been running conservation education programs in the area, and has started working with the local communities to reforest the hillsides around the lake with Polylepis. Unfortunately there has been uncontrolled development with many houses built on the flood plain close to the lake and road, which were destroyed in the floods.



Photo: ECOAN

Tree Nursery at Huilloc

Rainforest Concern recently provided funding to help with the education program ECOAN is running at local schools. ECOAN is also encouraging people to rebuild their homes higher up the hillsides, further away from the road and lake. Interestingly, the Inca ruins are at a higher altitude overlooking the lake – presumably they knew about these flood risks and planned accordingly.