

# Choco-Andean Corridor Overview & Progress

by Fiona Pérez, Manager, Rainforest Concern, Ecuador

All tropical forests are currently threatened by climate change and human activity but none more so than the cloud forests. Their unique and fragile ecosystems support an amazingly high number of endemic species. Their importance also lies in their ability to produce and store water. These forests are becoming highly fragmented due to human activity such as roads, logging, agriculture and mining and they are also highly sensitive to climate change, which drastically affects the species they support.

Rainforest Concern has witnessed these problems first hand in Ecuador and would like to draw your attention to our continuing work on the Choco-Andean Corridor Project where urgent measures are still needed to protect these incredible forests. Our focus this year has continued to be on forest protection, sustainable activities with communities and the recognition of the environmental services they provide through our Forest Credits programme (*see page 5*).



A jaguarundi

Photo: Pete Oxford

The Santa Lucia Co-operative continues to be a model community tourism project and we endeavour to support their work in a number of ways. This year Rainforest Concern will fund training workshops for the young people of the Nanegal and Marianitas communities, in a joint programme with the Santa Lucia community. This will create a pool of locally trained people to help in the sustainable eco-tourism and conservation activities of this area.

We are closely monitoring conservation threats arising in the area. In particular there is a strong likelihood that a new road will be built through forested areas between Santa Lucia and Paso Alto as a massive Government hydroelectric power project is planned on the Guayllabamba River. We are working with other organisations in the area in an attempt to prevent this.

We are delighted there have been so many sightings of Spectacled Bears in areas that Rainforest Concern has protected, particularly the Maquipucuna and Santa Lucia Reserves. Seventeen individuals, including juveniles, were seen during the months of August to October. Their presence seems to be attributed to a particular fruiting tree called pache, and their reproductive behaviour. These bears have had their extensive range greatly fragmented by agriculture and this illustrates how important it is to create these forested corridors. Two dedicated local scientists are carrying out studies in the Maquipucuna, Santa Lucia and Intag areas. The information they find will be invaluable for understanding the conditions needed to maintain viable populations of these magnificent creatures.

As mentioned in José Cueva's article on page 18, we are waiting for the Ministry of Environment to declare 5,000 hectares of the Paso Alto Mountain Range as Bosque Protector or 'Protected Forest'. If we take into account the two other adjacent protected areas belonging to other communities and supported by local organisations, Quinde and Cambagan, the total under protection will be around 15,000 hectares of cloud forest. This is no mean feat in an area so fragmented, and represents a significant block of forest in the middle of the corridor.

In 2009, Rainforest Concern managed to buy two more strategic parcels of land to extend the Neblina Reserve with much thanks to all our members and supporters. We would specifically like to thank Boden, Rainforest Rescue International (Australia), Good Gifts, the Rowse Family Trust and the Kilverstone Trust for their continuing support. The reserve now consists of 1,312 hectares, a significant increase on last year and has been declared as Bosque Protector in the national system. There are now four priority purchases, one of which will provide a connection to the 200,000 hectare Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve and Paramo region, a major breakthrough for the connectivity of the corridor and benefitting the free movement of all its species.

With the commitment of our local DECOIN colleagues, Armando Almeida and Sonja Dillman and the dedicated community forest wardens, we have continued to protect the reserve and also succeeded in reforesting old pasture lands with important funding from Good Gifts.

At the end of 2009, Ecometrica, the greenhouse gas assessment specialists came from the UK to carry out carbon measurements, and Carbon Auditors undertook the remote sensing analysis in the Neblina Reserve for Rainforest Concern's Forest Credits programme. We hope the resulting environmental service funds will enable us to undertake increased protection for the reserve and to carry out much needed community work in the buffer zones in the future.

The only way that we can succeed in the long term with the conservation of these wonderful forests is to balance conservation and the local economy, which means involving the local people who know these forests so well.

After 13 years we are getting steadily closer to our goal of creating a forest corridor stretching from a few miles north of Quito to the Colombian border, a distance of approximately 140 kilometres which connects private reserves, state protected forests and national parks. We hope we can rely on your continued support to achieve this.