

# Bigger is definitely better

by Louise Murgatroyd, based at Yachana

Rainforest Concern and the Foundation for Integrated Education and Development (FUNEDSIN) continue to work together towards conserving vital primary rainforest in Ecuador's Amazon region. Partners since 1999, the two organisations have achieved a new milestone in local conservation with the recent expansion of the Yachana Reserve Protected Forest. Purchased by the foundation with initial and generous assistance from Rainforest Concern, the reserve is located in the buffer zone of the Gran Sumaco National Park, and is surrounded by rural Kichwa indigenous communities in which the foundation has initiated a number of sustainable community development projects.



Volunteers sign to discourage hunting and fishing

Late last year, the foundation launched an urgent land purchase campaign in response to a bid from a local logging company to acquire several tracts of pristine primary rainforest adjacent to the reserve. With substantial support from Rainforest Concern, and the many friends of FUNEDSIN and visitors to the Yachana Eco-Lodge, the foundation succeeded in raising sufficient funds to secure an additional 600 acres of land, thus increasing the reserve size to a total of 4300 acres. Against the backdrop of global climate change and the importance of the Amazon basin's role in the atmospheric exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen, the expansion means more trees are now safe in an area increasingly under threat from logging, unsustainable farming practices, population growth and oil and gas exploitation.

The increase in the reserve's size also secures additional important habitat for the myriad species that live within its borders, most notably a



View towards the Gran Sumaco National Park from the reserve

potentially new species of glass frog. This tiny glass frog, so named for its translucent underbelly, was discovered in July by herpetologist Mario Yanez of Ecuador's Museum of Natural Sciences (MECN). Mr. Yanez was invited to spend a week on the reserve and provided training in amphibian and reptile survey techniques to GVI volunteers and staff as part of their on-going biodiversity study. The new frog was discovered during the course of the workshop and the process of formalising the find, which involves a review of existing frog collections and publishing details of the species in the scientific literature, is well underway.

If this frog proves to be a new species, the conservation importance of the reserve will increase significantly and studies will be undertaken to learn more about the species, and to monitor for its long-term survival. Frogs are under mounting threat throughout Central and South America and serve as "indicator species" because their presence and abundance provide valuable information about the overall health of an ecosystem.



A new species of glass frog?



Herpetologist Mario Yanez (front) works with GVI members in the reserve's research station

Over 400 species of bird, amphibian, reptile, mammal and butterfly have been identified in the reserve since the establishment of the research station just over a year ago, and the list keeps growing. Thanks to continued support from Rainforest Concern, Yachana's incredible wildlife, including the new glass frog, should be around for generations to come.