

**NEWS BULLETIN, WINTER 2003-2004**  
**BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE SIERRA GORDA**  
**BIOSPHERE RESERVE**

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The Sierra Gorda Ecological Group became the 1,000<sup>th</sup> member of the prestigious IUCN (World Conservation Union) when it was accepted by the IUCN Council during its meeting in Gland, Switzerland from December 1-3. Created in 1948, the World Conservation Union brings together 75 States, 108 government agencies, 750 plus NGOs, and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries in a unique worldwide partnership. IUCN's mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable.

As an initiative of the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda and as part of its Environmental Educational Program, two eco-clubs for young secondary school students have been formed within the Biosphere Reserve: one in Jalpan de Serra and another in San Pedro Escanela in the county of Pinal de Amoles. These are non-governmental organizations working in favor of resource conservation that have already been accepted by the Eco-Clubs International Network, headquartered in Cordoba, Argentina. In spite of their recent creation, these groups of young people have already carried out concrete actions in favor of their communities' environment. This is an initiative that is harvesting the results of many years of environmental educational activities carried out by the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda with students of the Sierra, and would not have been possible without the support of local teachers and officials.

On November 6, a special event to benefit the acquisition of lands for the conservation of habitats in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve took place at the prestigious Casa LAMM Cultural Center in Mexico City. Among those attending this pioneering event were Alberto Cardenas Jimenez, the Mexican minister of Environment and Natural Resources; Daniel Servitje, executive president of Grupo Bimbo; Dr. Ernesto Enkerlin Hoeflich, president of the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas; and famous pop music artist Emanuel. The Casa LAMM Cultural Center generously donated its facilities for this event, and the auction was undertaken thanks to the support of Grupo Bimbo through its non-governmental organization Reforestamos Mexico, in collaboration with the Grupo Ecologico. Approximately, \$130,000 pesos (\$11,800 U.S.) were raised from this event, which will permit the strict protection of almost 600 hectares of land of high biological value that are currently threatened by productive activities. The purchase of lands for conservation is a proven success for the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, where numerous areas have been protected under this conservation strategy since 1996.

The San Juan de los Duran eco-tourist cabins were the site of the First Sierra Gorda Research Forum, held October 23-25. The event was attended by researchers representing diverse disciplines from institutions such as the Institute of Ecology, the Autonomous University

of Queretaro, the Faculty of Sciences of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the Regional Botanical Garden of Cadereyta de Montes, the Institute of Earth Sciences of the UNAM, the Natural Resource Center of Queretaro, the Geology Institute of Hungary and the Miskolc University of Hungary.

During this forum, the first of this sort, existing knowledge on the reserve was shared, research deficiencies were identified, and plans of action were established. Alliances and plans for concrete research projects were developed, which will lead to the development of formal proposals to meet the research needs of the biosphere reserve, especially in collaboration with the Autonomous University of Queretaro, the Regional Botanical Garden of Cadereyta de Montes, the Institute of Ecology and the Faculty of Sciences of UNAM. The workshop was organized by the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve and the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda with support from the Science and Technology Council of the state of Queretaro.

On December 5, Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, federal director of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, gave the graduation speech at EARTH University (School of Agriculture for Tropical Humid Regions) in Costa Rica. Important personalities were present, including Dr. Abel Pacheco de La Espriella, president of the Republic of Costa Rica; two former presidents of Costa Rica; Dr. Jose A. Zaglul S., the rector of the university; and the university's Council of Directors, headed by Steve Knaebel, executive president of Cummins Mexico, a long-time friend and benefactor of the Sierra Gorda.

On December 16, the Mexican National Commission of Forestry (CONAFOR) announced that 45 landowners from the counties of Landa de Matamoros and Jalpan de Serra will receive payments from CONAFOR's Environmental Services Payments Program. This program is being implemented within the Reserve thanks to the work of the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda and the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve. It will benefit 4,663 acres of forest and jungle, the owners of which will receive payments totaling \$1,509,814 pesos (\$137,256 U.S.). This support is for five years, permitting the conservation of forests and jungles in priority hydrologic recharge areas and, at the same time, compensating land owners for not undertaking productive activities on their properties. Also being protected by this program are 9,000 acres of forest within the Reserve's area of influence in the high mountains of Xilitla in the bordering state of San Luis Potosi. This area is considered an extraordinary area for aquifer recharge.

Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, federal director of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, was invited to Stockholm, Sweden in October to participate in the meeting of the Board of Directors of the international organization Forest Trends. The mission of Forest Trends is to maintain and restore forest ecosystems by promoting incentives that diversify trade in the forest sector, moving beyond exclusive focus on lumber and fiber to a broader range of products and services. Its Board of Directors is composed of business members, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations such as the World Resources Institute, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund, Global Environment Fund, and Rainforest Action Network, among others. As a result of this encounter, Mrs. Ruiz Corzo was invited to become a Forest Trends associate, and thus will receive support to participate in the meetings of this organization.

As part of the project "Building a culture of sustainability in 11 communities of the Sierra Gorda semi-desert," which is being implemented with the assistance of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, 13 workshops were carried out in the semi-desert area of the biosphere reserve with oregano producers from different "ejidos" (small community agricultural areas). A booklet with practical information about the management and profitability of wild marjoram was also produced. These workshops were directed by Mrs. Rosalia Ocampo, Ph.D., an expert in the management of non-timber-yielding resources from the Autonomous University of Queretaro.

Zurich and Locarno, Switzerland, were the headquarters for the sixth meeting of the Katoomba Group in October, hosted and facilitated by Forest Trends and the global reinsurance company Swiss Re. The Katoomba Group is an international working group composed of leading experts from forest and energy industries, research institutions, the financial world, and environmental NGOs, all dedicated to facilitating strategic partnerships that can launch green forest products in the market place. This Group seeks to include environmental services in the market place, not only for initiatives on carbon sequestration, but also for the capture of water, scenic beauty and biodiversity. Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, federal director of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, was invited by Forest Trends to share the Sierra Gorda experience, and her participation received a warm welcome.

After one year of recycling activities, the fruitful alliance between the Grupo Ecologico and ECOCE (Ecology and Entrepreneurial Commitment), has gathered 17,500 kg of PET plastic from the 57 community recycling materials collected by the Grupo Ecologico. This type of plastic was a serious problem because, at a national level, there are a few centers that recycle this type of material. ECOCE, an organization that unites companies concerned with the management of solid wastes resulting from the commercialization of their products, is covering the costs of transporting the plastic to Mexico City.