

**“BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE
BIOSPHERE OF THE SIERRA GORDA
RESERVE” QUARTERLY BULLETIN**

Winter 2004



- In the heart of the Sierra Gorda, **the Jalpan dam joins the list of worldwide important wetlands registered in the RAMSAR Convention** along with 32 other sites in Mexico on February 2, 2004. The name of this convention corresponds to the Iranian city where the intergovernmental treaty was signed on February 2nd, 1972. Mexico became a member in 1978 with the purpose of achieving a rational use of wetlands of international importance as habitat for aquatic birds. 49 sites are registered with a total of 4,073,771 hectares hosting natural ecosystems, mangroves, swamps, tideland, lagoons and beaches as well as artificial humid soils such as the Jalpan dam. With this figure, Mexico becomes the third country with the highest number of areas registered in this treaty, confirming its commitment for the protection of one of the ecosystems with the highest conservation value in addition to the important environmental services that wetlands provide.
- The Jalpan dam performs an important function as site of refuge and nesting for 33 species of both resident and migratory aquatic birds, among which there are herons, bald coots, ducks, ibis, dabchicks, martinets, ospreys, an important colony of cormorants and, during the winter months, it hosts some individuals of the two species of pelicans present in Mexico. Additionally, in the outskirts of the dam there are at least 140 species of land birds of which 8 count with protection status and 5 are endemic, or exclusively found in Mexico.
- As part of the Productive Diversification Program, the **beekeeping activities carried out by the local producers in the Reserve got a great push ahead** with the advisory services of the expert Professor Angel Aleman from the Autonomous University of Queretaro, who has been assisting several communities. This activity has very high potential in the region due to the floristic wealth of its vegetation, the environmentally-friendly nature of the process and these products are in high demand with a good price in the market. Contacts have been established with the Apicultural Association of Queretaro A.C. who will collaborate with training and commercialization of the products.
 - **Research and evaluation of environmental impact activities carried out** over the biotic and abiotic resources of the Sierra Gorda. From March 4 to the 9th, Dr. Pal Gyarmati, from the Geological Service of Hungary and Dr. Csaba Centeri from the Institute of Environmental Management of the University of Szent Istvan, Hungary, visited the Biosphere Reserve and focused their activities on the evaluation of the erosive processes on the Jalpan river basin, in particular on the outskirts of San Pedro Escanela. This objective analysis of the environment impact resulting from the construction of public works covers not only the environmental resources but also the collateral effects they have on the environmental services they provide. The visitors will also contribute an important diagnosis concerning the geological justification for the study in process to propose the Sótano de Barro (Mud Basement) as World Natural Heritage, UNESCO.
 - **The First Regional Forum on Water** was held the 26 and 27 of February 2004, with the participation of 50 students and five professors from seven secondary schools from each county within the Reserve. The students actively participated with presentations of five principal themes: The Forest and Recharge of Aquifers, sinkholes and water infiltration, hydrological basins and the care and cleaning of streams and rivers. A thematic guide and a theoretical framework were provided in advance to the participants. The Teacher´s Union lent their facilities to

the Forum as did the recreational park "Aquatic World" in Jalpan de Serra. This is the first effort of its kind and confirms that Environmental Education has really reached the students, which is reflected in a change of attitude about the natural resources in the area. The students left the event prepared to present proposals to their corresponding municipal presidents in order to solve the environmental problems in their own communities and to share the acquired knowledge with their communities and parents. The experience increases the potential of forming future young leaders in the communities within the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve.

- The First Encounter of Cultural Journalists took place during the month of March. It was divided into seven sessions and benefited from the support of INDESOL. 32 students of 15 secondary and high schools came from the five counties inside the Reserve. The most participatory students interested in the environmental problems in their communities were selected to participate in promoting community-based tourist sites, reporting on environment problems, in addition to writing about traditions, local customs and local products. The results will be presented in a local gazette and journal. This initiative is expected to strengthen the local capacities of communication with the local authorities regarding environmental themes, the rescue of traditions and the promotion of natural and cultural wealth.
- The feasible zones for the use of sanitary landfills were selected in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve (SGBR) with the assistance of the Geo-hydrologist Gabor Kiss from the University of Miskolc, Hungary, who until recently was the Coordinator of the Monitoring of the Evaluation of the project "Biodiversity Conservation in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve. The local municipal governments demonstrate high interest in improving solid waste management in the principal towns in the Reserve. These sites were selected for the first time taking into account geology, soils, geo-hydrology, permeability and geomorphological factors, not to mention minimal environmental impact. For the time-being the region is benefiting from the expansion of the waste separation and recycling program.
- The two Eco-Clubs have been working in the SGBR developing an intense series of activities, demonstrating the enthusiasm of the youth in the few short months since the initiative was introduced by GESG.. The Jalpan River Clean-up is a priority action, sponsored by GESG, the honorable city hall of Jalpan de Serra, the primary schools and the local secondary school. At the same time, the pilot project for the separation of solid wastes in Jalpan City were carried out with the full participation of two neighborhoods in the county head. Three murals were painted with recycling themes. Finally, representatives of the Eco-Clubs were invited to participate in the Third International Training Seminar convened by the International Network of EcoClubs (RIE) carried out in San Jose, Costa Rica. Representatives of 8 Latin American countries participated with Sierra Gorda representing Mexico.
- In the near future, the non-profit Reforestamos Mexico A.C. will purchase approximately 300 hectares of well preserved cloud forest and pine-oak forests on two properties. The funds derive from a private event this past November celebrated at the Casa Lamm in Mexico City. . Located in a highly important area known as Joya Verde (Green Jewel) in the county of Jalpan de Serra, where species such as the brocket deer, white tail deer, puma, crested guan, armadillo, coatimundi, and bearded wood partridge among others, can be found. Purchasing these areas for their strict conservation will eliminate the threat of productive activities such as logging and cattle ranching . GESG staff provide the field work of geo-positioning, border verification, agreements with owners and the evaluation of biodiversity on the properties. The purchase of lands initiative favors the conservation of the last sanctuaries for wild life and is an alliance between civil society organizations.
- Two important institutions recently published books that include the Sierra Gorda experience: *Mejores Practicas Sociales 2003* (Best social practices) from the Social Development Institute (INDESOL) and *Historias de la Fe del Hombre en el Hombre* by the Eugenio Garza Sada Prize for its X Anniversary. The second book contains a testimony and narrative of the winners of the of this Prize granted each year by the Instituto Tecnologico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education) which was granted to the Sierra Gorda Ecological Group in 1996. We thank them for the endorsement.